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ISABELLA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "RHODA," &c.

"Take if you can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine.
Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me,—I teach."

COWPER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR HENRY COLBURN AND CO.

1823.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS AND SON, 25, PARLIAMENT STREET.

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ISABELLA.

CHAP. XXIII.

—— “Those who can pity, here
May, if they think it well, let fall a tear :
The subject well deserves it.”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA awoke the next morning with her heart alive to all the pleasures of her situation, and her mind strengthened to meet all its difficulties. She descended into the library, which now appeared to her as sancti-

fied, and she looked from it, upon a flower garden, gay with autumnal annuals, and kept with the exactest neatness. This garden extended to the lake, the banks of which were its southern boundary, and across which the park lay in ample extent, for some distance, broad, well-wooded, with spacious glades opening on either hand: then pressed by the surrounding hills, it seemed to run out into a valley, wild, broken, and solemn. The view, as far as the eye could reach, was closed by towering mountains, that seemed to make Eagle's Crag a world of itself, shut out from all other human interference.

Isabella thought of Rasselas, and his happy valley!

Isabella summoned Mrs. Evans to her side. "You must tell me the name of every cluster of rocks that has a name," said she; "and of every

group of trees that was ever so distinguished ; you must instruct me where every path leads, and make me forget, as soon as you can, that I am a stranger to that which I am so pleased to find my home."

Mrs. Evans's benevolent features brightened with pleasure. " Oh, Madam, there is many an honest heart that I shall rejoice by telling what you say. How have we all wished for this day, when my master would bring us a mistress ! Now I am sure he will love Eagle's Crag again better, a thousand times better than when he used to bound light and happy as that doe, from crag to crag."

" You must tell me of all those happy past-gone times," said Isabella, sighing. " But there is one thing that I do not see, and yet I am sure it is near : I mean a church."

" To be sure there is, Madam !" re-

turned Mrs. Evans ; “ but I wish I could go there without thinking of those who used to take such delight in seeing the people who sat around them, good and happy. But such times will come again *now*.”

“ But where is the church ? ” said Isabella. “ You cannot see it from the house, Madam,” replied Mrs. Evans, “ and yet it is just by—but so it is with a great many things at Eagle’s Crag ; for the great mountain does jut out here, and then there, in so many odd ways, that when you think you can go no farther, you just turn sharp, and there you find room enough and to spare for some pretty building, or some plot of garden-ground ; and all so sheltered ! and so warm ! The hot-house and the greenhouse, they are all built so, and they are all in very good repair, although they are not filled with plants and

fruits as they had used to be. And now, I dare say," continued Evans, who forgot the distance of respect, in the interest of her subject; "I dare say, Madam, that you think the lake quite shuts in the flower-garden at that end, and that you can get no farther; but it is no such matter—*there* is the path which leads to the church, and from thence there are many, many pretty walks; but they are rugged and steep; not fit for those who have been only used to the smack smooth grounds about London."

"I will soon teach myself to be used to them," said Isabella. "You have been in London then, Mrs. Evans?"

"Very often," said Evans. "I always went when my Lady went. I was her maid then; but I have never stirred from Eagle's Crag since I lost her; and I hope I never shall."

Shall I be so beloved? be so re-

gretted, again? thought Isabella. There is something very different in the manners of the servants to whom I have been accustomed from those of this good Evans; she seems to take a pleasure in recognising the relative situation of master and servant! while the very civility of the fine ladies and gentlemen who speak of their superiors as if they were their equals, is often actually impertinent; the cause of this difference must be in the principals, thought Isabella.

“When I have breakfasted,” said she, “you must shew me all the house; and let me see all the servants. I have not had much to do with those we had in London. Mr. Willoughby was so good as to save me all the trouble; but now he is not here, I shall like to be acquainted with every thing; and you, I am sure will tell me all that is necessary to know.”

Every word that Isabella uttered raised her more and more in the favour of Mrs. Evans ; and had not this faithful domestic been conscious of the difficulties in which Mr. Willoughby was involved, her joy on seeing once again such a head of the family at Eagle's Crag, would have known no bounds.

The inspection of the house and household had the same effect on the mind of Isabella as to her estimation of Mrs. Evans ; nor was she more struck with the magnificence of all that had been committed to the care of that faithful domestic, than with the skill that had been exerted in its preservation. She visited Mr. Roberts in his own apartment ; and there, making both these worthy dependants sit down, she explained in a few words the simplicity of her own taste ; the little attendance, or expense, that she should exact while she continued alone ; but she did all this with a dig-

nity, and a delicacy, that betrayed no consciousness of any cause for such restrictions but what was founded in her own preference to such a mode of living; and she inquired what provision could be made for extending the scale when Mr. Willoughby's arrival should make it necessary to resume more of the former manner of going on. She received such answers to these inquiries, as proved to her that all had been foreseen and arranged; she could not doubt but that this had been done by the suggestion of Lady Rachel, who, however she might stimulate her to act for herself, was thus advertent to render her way less intricate. She recalled moreover her charge that she must not forget that economy, and parsimony were of two houses; and she finished this first conversation with her new friends, by desiring that some little festivity might be prepared for the household, and

such other dependants as Roberts and Evans might see proper to include as guests, on the first arrival of the heir of the Willoughby's at Eagle's Crag.

“ Madam,” said Mr. Roberts, rising from his seat, and making a low and profound bow, “ may I be pardoned for saying so ; but when I look upon you, it seems quite wonderful to hear all you say ; and to see that you forget nothing. My master is a happy man ! ” bowing again.

“ Oh ! ” said Isabella, blushing, “ I wish you may always find it so, but indeed I am little used to such things, and I am afraid I shall make many mistakes.”

The fact, however, really was that Isabella was astonished with her own powers ; she no longer found herself that trivial Being whose greatest exertion was made in arranging a party of

pleasure, or in ornamenting a ball-room; but she felt that she had the destiny of many human creatures in her hands; and that she was responsible for the use or abuse of a property which involved the comfort and happiness of almost all around her.

Could it be that Mr. Willoughby had run away from such a responsibility? 'As large a remittance to be made to Dowkins as he can', thought Isabella; how shall I find proper terms in which to tell Roberts this? I dread his eye; it will tell me so much that I shall tremble to hear; but I must hear it, and Lady Rachel tells me that she rejoices that I am entered upon such a warfare! I will not shrink from it; but I could have been content to have been spared it.

Such reflections led her thoughts again to the church, she desired that the door might be opened, and the

way to it pointed out to her. Both were done by Mrs. Evans, who seemed as if she suffered an injury when any one else administered to the wishes and wants of her Lady.

Isabella entered the sacred walls more at that instant impressed by the feeling that she was about to visit the last receptacle of the ancestors of her husband, than with any respect to the high destiny to which the building was dedicated. Nor was there any other thought in the mind of her companion, who led her straight to the recess from whence descended the steps which led to the family vault. The sides of this recess were covered with various monumental notices of the Willoughby family, but contained, in the imagination of Mrs. Evans, but the single marble which commemorated the virtues and the loss of her lamented superiors. With tears fast flowing,

and with a faltering voice, she began to comment, and to explain; when Isabella's eye, glancing on an unadorned tablet of the purest white marble, read these words :

Sacred to the memory
of Rachel Roper !—the only offspring of
a widowed mother.

Ob. July 30, 17—.

Ætat. 21.

And underneath followed these lines :

Mortal, within this cold and narrow space
Lie beauty's bloom, and pleasure's sparkling grace ;
The sculptor's model, and the seraph's voice ;
An eye that taught e'en sadness to rejoice !
All these have perish'd by death's stunning blow ;
Like the scorch'd flower by fervid suns laid low :
With bitter sorrow let the wreck be mourn'd.
These all were dust, and are to dust return'd !
But love's chaste ardours, and a will resign'd ;
A heart all softness, and all truth the mind ;
With pious hope, and firm integrity ;
A Christian's faith, an angel's charity ;
These all surviv'd ! and to the realms of bliss
Bore her pure soul, in trembling ecstasies !
Exult immortal ! in thy fellow's lot !
Each joy remember'd, and each pain forgot !

“ What is that ? ” said Isabella ;

“had Lady Rachel Roper a daughter?”

“Ah, madam, did you not know that she had?” returned Evans, “I thought,—I supposed,—I thought that you must have known all about Miss Roper.”

“Poor Lady Rachel!” said Isabella.

“Ay, poor indeed, madam!” replied Mrs. Evans; “nobody knows what Lady Rachel has suffered! nor how she has borne it!”

Isabella was carefully examining dates.

“But how is this?” said she, “I had understood that Lady Rachel never resided here after the death of Mr. Willoughby and Lady Margaret? and this marble is dated several years after that event.”

“Lady Rachel,” returned Mrs. Evans, “would have Miss Roper buried where she was born; where

she had lived; and where once she thought she would have had a right to be buried."

"A right!" said Isabella; "was it not enough that Lady Rachel wished it?"

"Ah, madam," replied Mrs. Evans, "nobody disputed her right; but I mean if she had married my master."

Isabella became sick. She supported herself on an adjoining tomb. "Let us go," said she, "I will come again some other time."

Mrs. Evans, seeing her emotion, hastened to offer her arm; Isabella accepted it; and, breathing more freely when she returned to the open air, "Evans," said she, "you must tell me all this sad story. Oh, I sometimes thought that Lady Rachel knew not how to allow for feelings which she had never experienced; but, now I see that she has been tried with every

sorrow that can wound the human heart. Well may she treat those as light which touch little more than the fancy ; but I must know every thing ; you said that Lady Rachel's daughter was born here ? ”

“ Yes, madam ; ” replied Mrs. Evans, ; “ my lady went to her, when she was all in grief for the loss of Mr. Roper, and she brought her home with her, and they never parted afterwards. Lady Rachel and Mr. Roper had been lovers a great while, and somehow they could not marry ; and at last all came right, and they were the happiest people ! Oh ! I have heard my lady tell of their happiness till my eyes ran over. And then all of a sudden Mr. Roper was ordered abroad, and he was killed in the first battle ; and my lady was with child, or else it was thought that she would have died too ; but she did so struggle

to preserve the life of her infant!—and my lady took such care of her! And then the little girl was born; a lovely baby it was! There were only two years between her and my master. They were brought up together; and every one knew that the lady-sisters wished that they might like one another; and sure enough there was a time when they did, but they were too young to have the marriage talked of; and so after my Lady and Mr. Willoughby died it came to nothing; for my master went into the world, and thought of other things besides marrying; and then the young lady fell ill, and she went from bad to worse, till she died of a consumption, and then it was that Lady Rachel would bring her down here to be buried, and she came with her herself. Many wondered that she could; but Lady Rachel had all her thoughts in Heaven, so could bear

earthly losses. She never shed one tear all the time she was here ; but when the mournful ceremonies were over, and she got into her coach to go away. Oh, Madam ! never shall I forget her look ! and she drew her veil over her face ; and bold would have been the person who had uncovered it, knowing what they must have seen there !”

Isabella’s breath came thick and short, as she listened to this relation.

“ Is there any picture of Miss Roper ?” said she.

“ None, Madam, *only* of Miss Roper,” returned Mrs. Evans. “ My Lady Rachel took away that which was painted of her when she was about fifteen years old. But,” added she, hesitating, “ there is another.”

“ What here ?” said Isabella.

“ Yes, Madam ; but it was taken when she was a child ; and —

“Mr. Willoughby is painted in the same piece,” said Isabella.

“Why yes, Madam, that’s the thing. Both children ; and at play as it were together : *that* is here.”

“How could I miss seeing it when I looked over the whole house this morning?” said Isabella.

“You could not see it, Madam,” returned Evans.

“Is it taken down? Surely it has not been thrown aside,” said Isabella ; “Lady Rachel would never allow that.”

“Oh no, Madam, it is taken good care of,” said Mrs. Evans. “It hangs where it always did ; it is in the library.”

“Then why could not I see it?” said Isabella.

“Why, Madam, when my master was last here he was not quite like himself : he was out of spirits ; he

seemed to be afraid of everything that he used to love ; and one morning he sent for me into the library. ‘ Evans,’ said he, and the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke, ‘ I must have that picture taken down ; it makes me melancholy. I can’t inhabit this room if that picture is there, it must be taken down ; but you must take great care of it.’ My Lady, Sir, I said, hung it there with her own hands. ‘ Then,’ said he, quick, ‘ it shall *not* be taken down, though it make me as miserable as I deserve to be.’ I do not know what he meant by that, for I am sure, if the prayers of the poor and the praises of the rich are to be trusted, he well deserves to be happy. ‘ But let my papers and books,’ said he, ‘ be removed into the green parlour : I will live there.’ I was very sorry for this, Madam ; for I knew my master always loved the library, as they did all ; and

he had everything so handy about him there. So I thought I would manage so that he should not see the picture, and yet stay in the room he liked best; and I told him how I would contrive, and he seemed pleased. He said, 'I shall like to be near that picture, though I can't bear to see it: perhaps it may do me good to be near it.' And so I managed, as I had seen my Lady manage, when she had a mind to have two pictures in one place, that she might turn first one and then the other side outward, as she liked best; and there were pictures enow that would suit the size, and so I covered it up with a very pretty flower-piece of my Lady's own painting, and my master said no more about leaving the room; but all together, I suppose, he did not like thinking of things that he could not help thinking of when he was here, and so

he never came again ; but now it will be quite another thing ; now we shall see my dear master again."

This narration furnished Isabella with more than sufficient subject for reflection, but it oppressed her almost beyond the power of thought.

She believed that she had found, in what she had heard, a clue to the inconsistencies of her husband's character ; she saw, not only a naturally good disposition led astray by the influence of bad example ; but she saw also, in the eager versatility with which every new scheme of pleasure was pursued, an attempt to escape from the reproachful workings of a principle of right, which could not be violated with impunity—as long as this resource did not fail, Isabella could hope nothing from the generosity of his temper, or the kindness of his heart ; every means of repelling the foe must drop from

his slackened hand, before he would seek the only true means of peace in a reconciliation with his offended conscience. And could she bear to contemplate such a destitution for the being whom she loved best on earth? And how could she forbear sinking under the apprehension of the hardness of feeling too likely to be generated by such a process? These were but a part of the painful thoughts that made heavy the heart of Isabella. She might have hoped by undeviating rectitude, and persevering attachment, finally to have triumphed over every desultory fancy that the whim of the moment might give birth to; but she was now aware that she had to struggle against an early preference, which although it had not been powerful enough to withstand the first gush of the world's torrent, had like the supple willow, only bowed its head, to rise again with

added strength. Its course was now aided by a sense of the disappointment which had attended all that had been preferred to its claims, by the bitterness of self reproach, and by the hopelessness of regaining what had been thrown away. To this standard of excellence, exalted by regret, perhaps beyond its real height, Isabella could not but fear, that all which she could do would be referred ; and her heart sunk under the conviction of the disproportion between her own merits and those of the lamented Rachel. He may suffer, thought she, the charms of vice to engage his fancy, but to secure his affections there must be a sublimity of virtue in his wife that I shall never be able to reach !

Yet was there so much virtue in the bitter self-upbraidings of the unhappy Willoughby, and such a depth of feeling in the constancy of his attachment

to the object whom he had injured, that a ray of hope shot across the darkened mind of Isabella, that the time might come, when she should at once be able to heal the wounds of his mind, and to possess herself of his heart. This was indeed a holy rivalry! no baneful nor degrading feeling mingled in the contest; and at this moment Isabella desired nothing so much as to look upon the only representation within her reach, of the excellence that she was resolved to emulate.

She returned with all haste to the library, and eagerly turned the picture: there she beheld two children represented in their sports; but although the lineaments of the boy instantly recalled to her mind the features of her husband, her undivided attention was at this time directed to his companion, a beautiful infant of

about five years old, whose glowing health and charming figure were animated with such a spirit of frolick, mirth, and arch playfulness, as made it the most interesting object that Isabella had ever looked upon.

“Was Miss Roper like this charming child?” said Isabella.

“There cannot be two things more alike,” replied Mrs. Evans. “Surely there never was any thing equal to the merriment of that sweet baby; she was the darling of every body; so comical! always playing some good-natured trick or other; she seemed born for nothing but to laugh, yet how many tears did she shed and make others shed? and indeed in her very joys it might have been seen how much she could feel, for if any body was hurt, or any thing went wrong between her and my master, her large blue eyes would so fill with tears, and

she would so clasp her little hands together !”

“ How happy Mr. Willoughby must have been with such a companion !” said Isabella.

“ Yes, they were indeed the happiest playfellows I ever saw,” replied Mrs. Evans. “ But all *that* was childish sport, and it passed away. I do not know how it was with my master when she died, for he never came near us then, and he has never been here but once since. We heard he was quite beside himself, as it were. To be sure, he must have been very sorry ; and that was the reason, I suppose, that he did not attend the funeral. It was no want of respect or love either, I am sure ; but he has not such a lofty mind as Lady Rachel, and it would have killed him to have seen that sad ceremony.”

“ This picture must not be turned

again," said Isabella; "and you must shew me the places which Miss Roper best loved, and tell me what she did; and if there be anybody left that she would have been kind to."

"Ah! madam," said Mrs. Evans, "she was kind, to every body; but all her particular favourites Lady Rachel has taken care of. I believe she would think it a robbery if any body else were to do any thing for them."

"Except Mr. Willoughby, I suppose," said Isabella.

"I do not know, madam," said Evans, "but I think she is most jealous of him of all."

All this sunk deep into the mind of Isabella, and from this hour she attached herself to the memory of Miss Roper as to that of an elder sister, whom she equally honoured and loved, and whom she desired most exactly to imitate. She was pleased even to iden-

tify their interests ; she loved her the more for the love which she could not doubt but that she had borne for her husband, and she loved him the better for the love which he had had for her.

How blest would she have been, thought Isabella, to have made my poor Willoughby happy and good ! I will endeavour to make him both ! How fond would she have been of his boy ! I will love my little Godfrey better and better !

CHAP. XXIV.

“ One that in her sex, her years,
Wisdom and constancy, hath amazed me.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THESE reveries solaced the fancy and soothed the heart of Isabella; but in thinking of gratifying her who now soared above all human gratification, she lost not any of her attention in ministering to the real good of one who had yet to work out his final reward with sorrow and trembling.

She and Mr. Roberts became intimately confidential. The gentlemanly

old man laid before her with so much perspicuity, but at the same time with so much delicate consideration, the real state of Mr. Willoughby's affairs, that she was instructed without being appalled. She seized, as if by intuition, the very result which he was desirous to suggest. She distinguished and arranged with a clearness and facility that astonished both herself and him; and she, who to the eye might have seemed "bred only to sing, to dance, to dress," approved herself to the ear, the Goddess of Wisdom herself.

Her lofty conception of what was just gave an illumination to her intellect that superseded the necessity of instruction, and anticipated experience.

In the course of a few conversations they had between them settled a plan of economy upon which she was

persuaded that a residence at Eagle's Crag might be established, if not on the magnificent scale of former times, yet on such an one as would not exact any sacrifice either of comfort or hospitality. But the difficulty was still to "bell the cat;" for unless Mr. Willoughby would consent to sell the property in Hertfordshire, and to give up his town establishment, all that could be done by herself and Mr. Roberts at Eagle's Crag would be in vain.

To the accomplishment of these two points, therefore, Isabella turned all her thoughts; and happily for the zeal which was necessary to bring about so great a work, her inclinations and her understanding fully concurred.

If she durst not bring out into open day the *necessity* of the measure, the want was nearly supplied by her vivid painting of the *delight* which in her estimation would attend it.

Of Eagle's Crag she could unfeignedly speak as of a Paradise, from which she never could desire to wander;—she could incidentally suggest how susceptible of comfortable accommodation she found that, with a small household, which might appear at first sight suitable only to a large one.—She could enumerate the sources of amusement that its extensive library, its magnificent collection of pictures and prints, and its numerous and various musical instruments, afforded. And she could do all this with the glowing warmth of truth. She did indeed feel that they were sufficient, in her own case, to keep away the consciousness of solitude, and to cheat the progress of time. Of the health and vigor of her boy she could speak with equal sincerity and pleasure; and she could urge without the semblance of selfishness,

or the appearance of repining, the addition of the only circumstance that could add to her happiness.

Isabella no longer found restraint or difficulty in writing to Mr. Willoughby. Her subjects flowed from a source that was inexhaustible, and which remained unchecked even by the very unworthy returns which they produced.

Mr. Willoughby's letters were short, disjointed, and uninforming. They were, however, so far kind, that his regret on being parted from her and his boy, made a part of each ; to which was added a constant assurance that he would rejoin them the moment he was able. Nor did he ever fail, in the most vehement exhortations, that she would not refuse herself any thing whatever that could contribute to her accommodation or amusement. In confirmation of the sincerity of his wishes, and his attention in these points, she

would, not unfrequently, receive some dainty that her northern situation did not supply, or some new publication which he would tell her, she must not be “so out of the world” as not to read; and even once or twice there arrived an expensive article of dress, that he said he could not forbear from buying, because it would so peculiarly become her.

All was acceptable that came from his hand; but she sighed when she saw the selection that he seemed to believe suitable to her taste. No one could be more indifferent in the choice of food than was Isabella; her present situation took from her every desire of ornament in dress; and the books that were sent were not unread, more from a desire that she might be able to give an opinion of them in return, than from any pleasure that she derived from the perusal. Reading was

now become to Isabella an occupation, and even an obligation that she could not willingly interrupt for every idle volume that might fall in her way ; she was in regular correspondence with Lady Rachel, and by her suggestions she was enabled to make good use of the large store of knowledge with which she was surrounded. She now found that all which she had been accustomed to consider as having constituted her “being well-informed,” was merely the having had the instruments put into her hands by which she might gain information. “The Extracts,” “The Beauties,” “The Selections,” “The Blossoms,” and “The Flowers,” which had made her school-room studies, fell into their deserved discredit with her. She saw how a whole was injured by being seen only in parts, and how much more valuable was the little ingot than the extended gilding ; her reading had

now the perpetual delight of discovery, and she found her mind expand almost as sensibly, as she might have felt her person, had she catered as richly and as plentifully for the one as she did for the other.

But did Isabella do nothing but read and economise? Yes! she passed parts of her time in music, other parts in drawing, and as she made all that she did a study, there was a never-failing interest created by observing the progress towards perfection which resulted from what was begun only as an amusement. Her boy was an ever-springing fountain of delight, and if she had made any complaint of time, it would not have been that it moved too slowly, but that it passed too quickly.

And could occupation supply the wish for society? and was improvement sufficient for happiness?—*No!*

Isabella was not happy ! she was neither satisfied with the present, nor unapprehensive for the future. Her heart sunk under the indifference of her husband, and her understanding was appalled by the evils to which that husband was every day exposing himself. The very caresses which she bestowed on her child were mingled with tears ; but she had learnt to take her share in the general portion of human sorrows, without aggravating the sum which fell to her lot, by a morbid self-love, or by an unjust comparison between her own burthen and that of others ; she felt the want of affection in the man she loved, but she thought of the stroke of perpetual separation to which Lady Rachel had bowed, and repressed her sigh ; she trembled at the too probable destiny that hung over the head of her child, but she raised her eye to the tomb of Miss

Roper, and clasped him to her heart in a transport of thankfulness.

Nor was she wholly destitute of society. It is true that Eagle's Crag being without the usual limit of lake attractions in Westmorland, had neither its solitudes invaded by a frivolous curiosity, nor its neighbourhood dotted over with those equivocal erections, to which no legitimate designation can honestly be given ; there was here no etherial natives who had withdrawn from a corporeal world to live upon "the feast of reason and the flow of soul," because they had not more substantial food elsewhere ; there was here no picturesque poverty nor elegant distress ; no straw-roofed cottage, whose opening door disclosed the pale and beautiful female, arrayed in drapery of the most dazzling whiteness, engaged in the culinary art, while the celestial eye darted anxious solicitude

in hopes to descry the partner of her joys and sorrows, on whose return depended the scanty meal of the day; there was no returning lover, whose symmetry of form and intellectual physiognomy betrayed, under the coarseness of his habiliments and the meanness of his labours, the soul that might have directed the councils, and the figure that might have adorned the courts of kings!

All around was *true*! all as it appeared to be! the mingled web of human comforts and of human sorrow, the tares and the corn! but there was perhaps less of inequality of station in the neighbourhood of Eagle's Crag than would generally be found elsewhere.

The property which formed the domain of that ancient house, was more extended than proportionably productive, and although the extent made up

to its proprietors for the barrenness of many of its parts, yet it so far distanced any shouldering intruder, that there was not within the distance of several miles any family who visited the inhabitants of Eagle's Crag upon the footing of equality. All were dependants, or at least, in a degree to be *obliged* by the *great* house ; and as in Isabella's retirement she was not disposed to seek society from afar, neither was she likely to be sought by those who could expect neither amusement nor festivity as the reward of the trouble they must take in seeking her.

But there was still a number of individuals of a humbler station, from whose resemblance the lapse of fourteen years had not obliterated the impression that the unwearied kindness and hospitality of Mr. Willoughby and Lady Margaret had made. There was also a generation grown up who had heard their

mothers and their aunts tell of the happy hours that they had passed at *the Hall*; of the magnificence of its apartments, and of the graciousness of its inhabitants; who had been compelled to listen again and again to the tales that were gone by, and to the lamentations that they would return no more; and in consequence to sit down under the desponding conviction that *they* should never have such histories to relate to *their* posterity.

No little stir was therefore of course occasioned amongst the little hive of busy bodies when the report was spread from one to the other, "that Mr. Willoughby and his Lady were coming to live always and for ever at Eagle's Crag."

The old were sure that it did not signify to them, come who would! they could not be like *their* Mr. Willoughby, and the Lady Margaret; they should not take the trouble to go to the Hall

to see they did not know whom. Mr. Willoughby was always very kind and very civil, but he was not like his father ; and as to his lady, to be sure she would be above such plain bodies as they were ; it was too much to expect another Lady Margaret.

The young held a different language. It was, “nay, mother,” and “indeed, aunt,” and “why should not this young lady be as good as the other young lady? for Lady Margaret was not old ; no, not when she died ;” and for “their parts they could not but think the world was as good as it ever was : why should it not? It was older, and the older people grew the wiser they became ; at least they were always told so ; and why should it not be the same with the world? They should like to see the inside of that fine place, of which they had heard so much. The sight of the very towers

and walls of it always made them long. And then it would be so disrespectful not to pay their duty to their Landlord and his Lady; they would think that they did not know in Westmorland what was proper and right."

But all these debatings were out of place. "Mr. Willoughby was not coming at all, and his lady only for a little, and away again. Well, there is no believing anybody. They were sure they had it from one, who had it from one, who was told it by a cousin of Mrs. Evans, and to be sure Mrs. Evans must know; and yet it is all moonshine; and now we shall none of us ever go again to Eagle's Crag," with a tone of disappointment, said the one who had the most strongly protested against availing herself of the opportunity which she had so lately thought within her power.

The note of rumour was again

changed : Mrs. Willoughby was coming with her little boy ; to be all alone, and to stay through the long long winter !” poor, poor young lady ! she will be moped to death ; it will be quite charity to call upon her sometimes, and she will be glad to hear what used to be done ; and then her sweet baby ! I dare say he is very like his grandfather. I am sure I would walk ten miles to see him ; and so would I, echoed all the veterans ; and I would walk twenty said the young, only just to have a peep at all the fine furniture that you have told us of, and which Mrs. Evans has kept so closely covered up these hundred years, that nobody has seen it but herself.

And thus a visit to Eagle’s Crag was carried *nemine contradicente*.

But it was easier to decide both for and against so important a measure before the moment of putting it into

execution arrived, than to adhere to either purpose when the time for action was come. A visit to Eagle's Crag could not be carried into execution without causing many qualms to arise in the breasts of the inexperienced, and many scruples were suggested by the cautious ; it was thought most expedient to secure a friend in the garrison before any attack was made on the fort ; if Mrs. Evans would sanction their approach, they should not be afraid of their reception.

The little feast that Isabella had ordered upon her arrival had paved the way for entering upon the negotiation meditated. It had indeed been given to a lower order of dependants, but so much had been reported of the beauty and graciousness of Isabella, in the condescension of bringing her boy amongst them herself, and of the kind and encouraging words that she had

spoken to each, that all dread of repulse to an offered mark of respect was done away. The vicar's wife was deputed to speak to Mrs. Evans; Mrs. Evans undertook to communicate Isabella's determination, venturing at the same time to anticipate it, by a confident assurance that Mrs. Willoughby would be glad to see all her neighbours, and that she had told her so herself. The offer was made and graciously accepted—the visitations were performed, and the old could no longer boast of an exclusive knowledge of the glories of Eagle's Crag, or lay claim to the peculiar honour of having been distinguished by the civilities of its owners; the young were as well informed, and had been as graciously received as any mother or aunt of the whole collection.

Thus had Isabella soon a little circle of acquaintance and well-wishers; from whom, if she did not receive any

very vivid pleasure, she could always communicate it: and thus were her walks and rides rescued from the solitude and dreariness that must otherwise have attended them. She could now have an end to pursue, whenever she stirred beyond the limits of her immediate home. She had some little presents to deliver at one house; she was sure that she could have a cup of milk for Godfrey at another; she had promised to visit Mrs. Russel's bees; or she was to go and eat some of Mrs. Perry's potted char. The interchange of good offices was unceasing; and Isabella returned cheered by the respect she had received or the importance that she had conferred.

Nor had she less pleasure from her visitations amongst the still poorer class of her neighbours. The only change that she had made in the economy of her personal establishment

had been the parting with her own maid. It had been her wish, from her first conversation with Mr. Roberts, to divest herself of so expensive, and, in her present situation, so useless an appendage; but she was unwilling to discharge a person against whom she had no precise fault to allege, and she acted under Lady Rachel's caution, both as to the inefficiency of any sacrifice that she could make, and the inexpediency of any sudden or very obvious change in her way of life. But Mrs. Adams obviated all scruples, and took away all ground for curiosity or suspicion of mystery, by dismissing herself. At the end of the first fortnight she informed Isabella, "that she was extremely sorry—excessively so—but she found it absolutely impossible to live at Eagle's Crag. The place did not agree with her; she fancied the air was too sharp

for her tender lungs. 'The doctor had always told her that her lungs were tender; and she was sure she had had such an oppression upon her spirits ever since she came down that shocking hill, that she should die of the vapours if she continued where she was. The sight of that monstrous mountain, which always looked as if it was tumbling on their heads, made her quite nervous. She could not conceive how Mrs. Willoughby could bear it. She was sure she could not; and though indeed she was very sorry to inconvenience Mrs. Willoughby, yet the sooner she could make it agreeable to part with her the better."

Isabella could make this agreeable immediately, for Mrs. Adams appeared to her quite a different creature in the offices of adorning her person, and in suggesting the various means of doing so, which qualities had very well re-

commended her to her favour in town, to Mrs. Adams nervous and vapourish, and with a little affected short cough, at Eagle's Crag, where she had scarce need of any part of her services, and none at all for her science.

Her very phraseology seemed to be altered ; for Isabella thought that she could never have borne such a jargon of affectation and ignorance as Mrs. Adams's language sounded in her ears, since she had been used to the respectful plainness of Mrs. Evans's good sense. For the first time in her life, Isabella was aware of the difference between vulgarity and rusticity ; the expression of nature, and the apeing refinement. The preference which she gave to the former mode made her very glad, independently of every other motive for parting with her, to replace the fine Mrs. Adams by an active, civil, natural young woman, the

niece of Mrs. Evans. Fortunately her footman was Westmorland born; had been brought up by Lady Rachel Roper; and on Mr. Willoughby's marriage had been promoted from a subaltern station in Lady Rachel's family to the honour of attending on Isabella.

George was happy to return amongst his friends; and took much greater delight in walking by the side of Isabella's pony, as she scrambled up the hills, or made her way through the intricacies of the vallies, than he had ever done stuck up behind her carriage.

Her equipage generally consisted of a pony for herself, and another, with a saddle suited to the purpose, on which the nurse and her boy were placed, while the nursery-maid and her own new attendant, who did not appear to have either nerves or lungs, walked by its side, led it by the bridle,

or occasionally took the nurse's place, or relieved her for a time of her burthen.

In this guise Isabella made daily excursions, either amongst those who considered themselves as her acquaintance, or those who looked upon her only as their benefactress; and she would have found it difficult to have determined from which she received the greatest gratification, or which was the better company. The provincial accent and peculiar idiom of the country, both of which had extraordinary charms for the imagination, if not for the ear, of Isabella, were stronger in the latter; and when they set before her a bowl of cream and a saucer of sweetmeats, inviting her to eat of the "boiled up berries, strays, and rhasps," or told her, in contradistinction to the turf generally burnt, that they "had cobbles for the cham-

bers," she felt the full power of simplicity, and thought it ill exchanged for one advancing step towards greater refinement or higher pretensions. But still there were hours when Isabella sighed for the interchange of intellect; when she longed to hear a human voice that could reply to her in language the full force of which was felt mutually by the speaker and the hearer. Nor did she long sigh in vain.

CHAP. XXV.

“ His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles, his heart as free from fraud, as earth from heaven.”

SHAKESPEARE.

ONE day, when she had extended her rambles somewhat out of their usual direction, she perceived a neat habitation which she had not noticed before. It was situated in a small meadow, that sloped from the mountain that sheltered it from the north, down to a brook, the southern boundary of the little homestead.

There was nothing in the appearance of the house beyond that of a cottage : a genuine cottage, without any pretence to “gentility.” But there was an air of sedulous care bestowed upon the stone walls, and blue tiles of the building, and an attention to ornament in the arrangement of the diminutive garden which lay before it, that told her that its inhabitants had leisure and means beyond the necessary wants and works of the day. Isabella inquired of her attendants the name of this pretty residence ; and whether they knew any thing of those to whom it belonged. She was readily answered by her Westmorland damsel, that the place was called “Fell-beck ; and for all that it looked no bigger, nor no better than a cottage, yet, as she had been told, there lived within a cousin of a Queen.”

Isabella could not hope from her

present informer much elucidation of the pedigree of this royal scion ; yet she asked what she meant by that ? Sarah could not tell ; but asked in her turn, if there were not once a Queen who had lived in Westmorland, whose name was Parr ? Isabella replied, yes, Catherine Parr.

“ Why then, Madam,” replied Sarah, “ that’s it ; for this gentleman’s name is Parr ; and he has a daughter, and her name’s Catherine.”

Isabella smiled at the accuracy of Sarah’s heraldic knowledge, but felt her curiosity so much raised as to pursue her inquiries, as to the where, and the how, and the why ? but all that she could learn farther was, “ that Mr. Parr, the people said, had once been a great man ; but that now he was not great, yet had enough to give a deal to every body who wanted it ; and that Miss Catherine was very wise, and very

good ; that she knew about the stars, and the flowers ; and could doctor the sick, and make clothes for the poor ; and that she and her father lived together, with no other creature than one old woman.”

All this only increased Isabella's desire to know more ; she advanced almost unwittingly towards the house ; always saying to herself that she would by no means intrude upon the privacy of any body ; and yet so reluctant to return without having had at least a distant view of this extraordinary Mr. Parr, and his still more extraordinary daughter, that she continued to wind up the narrow lane which she was told led the nearest that she could approach to the house, without entering its actual premises. She was now arrived at a neat wicket, which opened directly into the little garden, and had begun to feel the absolute neces-

sity of immediately proceeding to pass the house, without having had her curiosity gratified, when there issued from the stone porch of the dwelling a female figure, that she could not doubt must be the very Catherine Parr, whom she had so much desired to see. To stand and gaze was impossible ; yet never before had she so little felt herself under the influence of propriety.

The person who thus presented herself to her notice, must have fixed the gaze of the most incurious observer.

It was a form of almost sylph-like lightness : arrayed in a jacket and petticoat of Scottish tartan ; the jacket was made high in the back, but disclosed a throat and neck of the most dazzling whiteness ; while the succinct petticoat betrayed the prettiest foot and ancle imaginable ; the hands and arms were uncovered, even with a glove, and

rivalled the neck in fairness ; a profusion of light brown hair was confined by a ribbon, put on in the fashion of the Scottish snood, and gave additional interest to the pensive paleness of a countenance which seemed scarcely to belong to any human being. But in vain did such an assemblage of attractions burst on the sight of Isabella ; in spite of the earnestness of her desire to the contrary, she urged her pony forward, giving at the same time some caution to the nurse for the accommodation of the baby. Nothing she either did or said, could escape the observation of Miss Parr, who was not ten paces from her ; she was indeed instantly by her side, inviting her in modest and well-bred phrase, but with the blush of timidity on her cheek, to do her the favour to accept any refreshment, either for herself or her infant, that she had to offer ; and to

allow that the child might rest as long as it was agreeable to her.

Isabella met the courtesy which offered so full a satisfaction to her wishes with all the ease and politeness which her mode of life gave her, and with a sweetness and urbanity all her own. She acknowledged, that a wish to have a nearer view of what had pleased her so much at a distance, had betrayed her into taking a liberty, for which she was sensible she had to apologize, and that she was much obliged for the opportunity given her of doing so in a manner so agreeable to herself.

Isabella was not long in dismounting ; she followed her new acquaintance to the house, with a heart beating with expectation of what she was to see there. The porch opened into a recess ; the four sides of which were nearly taken up with four doors that

led from it; that on the right hand opened into a room of about twenty feet long, and sixteen wide, with windows to the eastern and southern sun.

And now Isabella, though she had expected to see something by no means correspondent to the size or outward appearance of the building, was struck with a degree of surprise, which not all her habitual good breeding enabled her wholly to conceal.

Nearly the whole of the walls of the room were fitted up with books, apparently arranged with regard to the science or subject on which they might be supposed to treat; while the spaces not so occupied, were filled with astronomical apparatus, globes, or musical instruments, and on the several tables lay implements for writing or drawing; none of which, by the half written manuscript, and unfinished

sketches that lay amongst them, seemed to be there for no purpose.

But here the wonder of the apartment ended, or rather took another direction; all that there was of furniture was of the plainest and simplest form; neither affecting elegance, nor affording much of accommodation; the floor was covered with common matting; there was no sofa; and the chairs were of unstained wood, with straw bottoms. There was indeed one exception in an armed chair, well upholstered, and evidently calculated for the comfort and repose of the person for whose use it was destined.

From this chair arose, upon Isabella's entrance, the most magnificent figure that she thought she had ever seen. There was in it the ruins of all that could have formed the most finished model of masculine perfection; and there still remained so much of the fire

of youth in the eye, and the vigour of the limbs, that the grey hair which shaded the commanding forehead, and the wrinkles which marked its surface, seemed more to have been planted there by misfortune than by age.

“I am persuaded,” said Mr. Parr, “that it can only be Mrs. Willoughby whom I have the honour to see before me. Do me the favour to take this chair. A manacle,” added he, with an affectionate smile cast on Catherine, “that my daughter has fixed on the age of her father.”

Isabella was so surprised and confounded with all that she saw and heard, that she could scarcely command herself to give intelligible utterance to the apology for the intrusion of which she had been guilty.

“A liberty,” she said, “however, that she could hardly repent that she had taken.”

“ The liberty is on our side ;” replied Mr. Parr ; “ and I must candidly acknowledge, taken with the most perfect malice afore-thought. I would not entrap you, madam, by any false appearance of what you might obligingly esteem our benevolent attention either to your wishes, or to your accommodation, into an acquaintance that you may not desire to form ; but I will openly avow, that it would give me a gratification beyond what you may perhaps at present be able to understand, if you would allow my daughter and myself sometimes to be visitors at Eagle’s Crag. If this does not suit your own plans, I trust to the ingenuousness of your countenance, that you will explicitly tell me so *now* ; when such explicitness cannot be offensive, as being impossible to be grounded upon any personal dislike. If in future we should prove unworthy of the favour

we solicit, it will be easy, as it will be right, to shut the doors of Eagle's Crag against us."

Isabella knew not what to think of the person who thus addressed her; so unlike was his proceeding to any which she had before met with. Yet it could be the effect neither of unfeeling boldness; nor could it proceed from ignorance of the manners of the world. The delicate attention that he shewed to every circumstance by which she might be restrained, and the elegance and superiority of his address, forbad both the one and the other supposition.

She replied, with as little embarrassment and as much frankness as she could at that moment command, "that any gratification which she could afford either to himself or his daughter they were entitled to expect from her hands, and that she should consider it as an addi-

tional obligation if they would allow her to offer it at Eagle's Crag.

Mr. Parr made Isabella a bow, as elegant as it was grateful; tears stood in his eyes.

"If ever, Madam," said he, "you should see, which God forbid! that fine boy likely to be left alone, and deserted in a wicked and unfeeling world, you will understand the impulse that has this day impelled me to set at defiance all vulgar forms; you will feel the gratitude that you have implanted *here!*" said he, laying his hand upon his heart.

While this conversation was passing, Catherine had drawn from under one of the tables a long and low stool, well cushioned, on which she had placed the nurse with the baby on her knee; and having herself vanished through a different door than that by which Isabella had entered the room, she had

returned in an instant, accompanied by an old female servant, the very quintessence of old-fashioned neatness, loaded with bread and butter, milk and fruit, all excellent looking of their kind, and served up with a propriety and care that almost amounted to elegance. The sparkling water of the country was also placed before Isabella; to which Mr. Parr, withdrawing for a moment, added on his return two decanters of foreign wine.

“There is nothing,” said Isabella, “that is equal to Westmorland hospitality. It is a virtue that I knew only by name before I came here.”

“When *all* is but *little*,” returned Mr. Parr, “there is no room for selection. The frankness of the gift must atone for the smallness of the offering.”

“But,” said Isabella, “I am so surrounded by riches that I am at a loss on which to fix my attention. This

seems to be a very fine instrument," said she, touching the keys of a piano-forte, which appeared to have no fault but being rather too large for the room in which it was placed.

"We are all epicures in our own way," returned Mr. Parr. "My daughter fancies herself a pattern of moderation and temperance, because she has no taste for dress or furniture ; but she is as dainty as the rest of us in the tone of her piano-forte or her harp."

"Mrs. Willoughby would scarcely think so," said Catherine, with a blush and a smile, "if she were to hear the notes which you, my dear father, are compelled to hear from me every night."

"I hope myself to be a judge of that," said Isabella, "as I flatter myself that you and Mr. Parr will allow me to convince you at Eagle's Crag of

the sense I have of the pleasure that I have received at Fell-beck.”

Both the father and daughter looked pleased at this well-bred recognition of names, with which they hardly supposed that Isabella was acquainted.

“ I cannot imagine,” continued Isabella, “ how I should have remained so long unacquainted with this beautiful spot, as I go out with my boy every day, and have endeavoured to vary my rides as much as possible ; but I apprehend now, that, however they begin, they will generally take in Fell-beck before they end.”

Isabella now arose to take her leave, when she desired that she might be allowed to send her pony for Miss Parr at an early hour the next day.

“ We shall have a most sincere pleasure in waiting upon you to-morrow,” returned Mr. Parr ; “ but we are both excellent walkers. Riding is not

one of Catherine's exceptions to self-denial."

"But the evenings now shut in so soon," said Isabella, "that I hope you will not refuse to pass the night at Eagle's Crag. The morning is the best time for walking at this time of the year."

Mr. Parr again bowed.

"You know, madam, how to reconcile *un Impertinente malgré lui* to himself," said he. "We shall gratefully accept your extended favours."

This little event had all the importance of an adventure to Isabella.

She had been enchanted with all that she had seen, and she longed impatiently to know every thing that could be known concerning Mr. Parr and his daughter; yet she had figured them to herself as the victims of such a series of extraordinary circumstances as

was likely to make whatever she did hear flat and uninteresting.

The account that she could collect of them from Mr. Roberts, or Mrs. Evans, was very meagre, and left much to be filled up by imagination or conjecture. Of the unblemished honour and high character of Mr. Parr, however, they spoke in the strongest terms; and to the great estimation in which in former times he had been held at Eagle's Crag they could also depose. But this was at a period long past. There had intervened a certain number of years when he had been lost sight of from the neighbourhood, and had only been spoken of as having sold all the property which he had once possessed in the country. About five years previous to the present time he had re-appeared, bringing with him his daughter, then just rising into womanhood. He had purchased Fell-beck,

and had built the house which he inhabited. He mingled in no society, and was scarcely known beyond the immediate spot where he resided : but there he was known by the blessings of all to whom he could communicate good ; in all that related to his small household, or personal gratification, frugal and sparing, although neither niggard nor unindulgent ; but in charity magnificent ; and sometimes the object of astonishment to his few neighbours from the arrival of a large box of books, an expensive apparatus for some scientific purpose, or some new musical instrument.

The young lady was represented as gentle and retiring ; active when she could be useful, but uncommunicative, and with little of the alacrity or cheerfulness of youth ; none of its ebullition, indiscretion, or in consequence. “ She seemed not made for this world,” was the observation of the few who ap-

proached her ; to whom she appeared too wise and too good to mix with common mortals.

Isabella could understand how such a character might be formed by sorrow and deprivation ; and was resolved that she would sooth the one and repair the other to the extent of her abilities.

Isabella expected her guests with impatience ; her usual occupations were suspended in conjecturing what degree of confidence Mr. Parr intended to afford her, and what might make the subject of such a confidence ; for she could not but be aware, from what had already passed, that it was his purpose to interest her in the welfare of his daughter, and perhaps to ask her patronage for her. She could not suppose, from the sense that he had evinced both of delicacy and propriety, even when he seemed to intrench upon

their rights, that he would do this without endeavouring to shew that she was worthy of interest, and that she would not disgrace patronage; yet it seemed strange that he should choose so young a person as herself for the repository of secrets which seemed to be so carefully shut out from the rest of the world. There was something very extraordinary in all this! Isabella did not therefore like it the worse; however, she was forced by circumstances into thoughts and conduct beyond her age, or her experience; her imagination was not only young but ardent, and in giving way to it, she might be pardoned, if for once she lost sight of the cool prudence that would have shrunk from admitting two entire strangers to her privacy, or for having neglected a due attention to the evil eventual to herself, in the hope of doing good to others.

It is certain that neither one nor the other occurred at this time to Isabella in such a degree as to give her any regret for the frankness with which she had opened her house to those of whom she knew nothing but that there was a mystery hung over their situation. Yet she had been glad to feel something of a sanction for what she had done, from the account which she had received of the former well known respectability of Mr. Parr's character; and she was resolved that she would relate all that had occurred to Lady Rachel, the moment that she should be able to add to it the result of her own further knowledge of the manners and the sentiments of her new acquaintance.

There was an early punctuality in the way of keeping their engagement, that shewed how agreeable it was to their wishes; and a simplicity in their

appearance that proved those wishes not to be grounded in a sense of the superiority in station of the person whom they visited. Catherine had made no change in the dress which she had worn the day before ; and Mr. Parr, depositing a little package on a table in the hall, where Isabella met them, said, “ my dear Catherine, when you go to your room you will not forget to take this with you.”

Isabella watched Mr. Parr to see whether he would make any recognition of the objects around him ; or would allude to the period when he was an accustomed guest in that house upon a very different footing to that of carrying his own bundle.

Neither was the case ; yet she saw him cast a furtive look on one side, and then on the other, as wishing to behold what once he knew was there to be seen ; she saw the working of his

countenance, and the strength of the effort with which he composed it to the due discharge of the civilities of the moment ; but she saw this effort almost fail him on his entering the library. Over the chimney-piece of that room hung a full-length picture of Mr. Willoughby's father. Mr. Parr made a few hasty steps towards it, as if to feast his eye on the features of one whom he had loved ; but he stopped short ; looked around the room ; walked to the window ; and, after a few moments' struggle for the power of speech, he said, turning to Isabella, " are there any of the wild red deer in the park ? it used to be one of their haunts."

" You are well acquainted with this country I believe," said Isabella.

" I *have* been, madam," replied Mr. Parr. " Catherine, you have heard me speak of Eagle's Crag ; you now see

it, and may judge whether I have been exorbitant in my estimation of it."

The moment of agitation was past, and Mr. Parr appeared to take pleasure in reviewing the objects from whence he had been so long estranged.

"You have a noble store of information around you, madam," said he, looking on the books; "and of amusement also. I am much mistaken if you do not know how to profit by both."

"I should be very happy to do so under so able a direction as I must suppose yours to be, by what I observed at Fell-beck yesterday," replied Isabella; "and I suspect that Miss Parr, if she will so far condescend, is very able to become my instructress."

"Probably," returned Mr. Parr, with that genuineness of character by which he was so peculiarly marked; "you might be of mutual use to each

other. Catherine has in all likelihood gone beyond you in the exactness and depth of her acquirements, for to add another and another link to knowledge has been the only occupation of her life, yet the sum of what she knows is small ; in all the ornamental accomplishments of female instruction, there is no question but that you have exceeded her far. In drawing and music, of which I wished her to know something, as affording breaks into the too languid monotony of her existence, she has had no other instructor than myself for many years past, and her progress has been in proportion to the skill of her master."

" We will each put the other to the test," said Isabella, smiling ; " and at present my leisure may more than rival hers ; but you must not tax it too high ; for I apprehend that I shall be

often tempted to neglect the volume, or the instrument, for the more rare pleasure of conversation."

"Catherine will not dispute the ground with you there, madam," said Mr. Parr, smiling, "for she is silent — too silent: and how should it be otherwise, when she has only an old man to talk to?"

"Oh, my father!" said Catherine, "whom should I like to talk to so well?"

"My little boy will teach you to talk," said Isabella; "for, silent as he is, he loves nothing so well as being talked to."

"Perhaps that is my case," said Catherine, with a blush. "I do so love to hear my father talk, that I forget I ought to say anything myself."

Every word that passed recommended Isabella's guests more and more to her approbation; and before

the hour of retiring to dress for dinner arrived, she was persuaded that she had made a most valuable acquisition in having become acquainted with them.

CHAP. XXVI.

— “Take him for all in all,
You will not look upon his like again.”

SHAKSPEARE.

CATHERINE appeared at dinner in the same simplicity of dress which she had worn in the morning. The form was the same, the material only was changed from tartan to white muslin ; the hair was confined as before by a single ribbon, but its colour was different. Isabella endeavoured to give the tone of gaiety to their table-talk ; nor did she endeavour in vain. Mr. Parr

maintained as fully his claim to all the lighter graces of conversation, as he had done to the higher powers of intellect. Even a vein of humour, and the sparkles of wit, broke from beneath the crust that solitude and misfortune had been so long gathering over them. The effect upon the sensitive Catherine was striking: she listened, — she smiled, — she blushed with delight; and her eye almost made a verbal appeal to Isabella, whether, so listening, she could ever have a desire to speak?

Isabella, so long unused to the interchange of thought with any one who could fully understand her, was not less pleased than Catherine. The wine and the fruits had been long untasted before Isabella thought of withdrawing with her youthful companion; and if the pleasure that Mr. Parr had taken in the colloquy was to be judged

of by his eagerness to renew it, he had not been less gratified than either of the two ladies. He rejoined them in the library almost immediately.

“I have been walking through the long gallery,” said he to Isabella: “will you give Catherine leave to see, while there is yet a ray of light, some of the pictures that hang there, and of which she has heard me speak?”

“I will attend her this moment,” said Isabella.

“I beg that she may go alone,” said Mr. Parr. “Catherine has no fear of ghosts.”

Isabella, conceiving that there was some particular reason for this request, as well as for sending poor Catherine to look upon pictures which it was too dark to see, made no farther opposition; but pointing out to Catherine how she would most readily find the

way to the gallery, she resumed her seat.

“I am sensible, madam,” said Mr. Parr, “of the apology I owe you for the peremptory manner I assume; but I should not think myself an honest man if I accepted the hospitality of your roof, even for one night, while there could remain upon your mind a single doubt as to the propriety of having afforded it me. I have avowed my motives for having sought your acquaintance, and accepted your kindness; but it is fitting you should know to whom you have granted the one, and offered the other.

“Already you know my name, Parr—Edward Parr. It is a name well known to Lady Rachel Roper, and one that need not shrink from her comment. But there have been in my life years of obscurity, if not of mystery, that must have withdrawn me

from her sight. You have a right to hear my account of the cause of this obscurity, that it may be confronted, if you wish to put it to such a proof, by what others can say of me.

“Some two or three and twenty years ago, I was as happy as it is necessary for humanity to be! Through the progress of my education, and in my outset of life, I had fulfilled the hopes of those from whom I was descended. I had added to the usual acquisitions to be made in England, the knowledge of foreign countries; and I had only to reproach myself that in my pursuit of the latter I had lingered too long. I returned to my native country scarcely in time to close the eyes of one of the best of fathers. Some of his last words were, ‘My son, bereave not the land of your forefathers of the benefit of your example, and the expenditure of your property.’

These words remained for several years the law of my mind, and it was in that period that I was the friend and inmate of this house.

“ All that I had of good in me was confirmed by the virtues which were the objects of my daily observation : and in the conduct of a fortune which, although not large, was affluent, as it exceeded my wishes, in the pursuit of science, in the intercourse of friendship, and the exercise of piety and benevolence, I possessed all that a reasonable being could desire, and all that an immortal one could hope ! It might have been supposed also that being safe in port, I should have put out to sea no more. I touched upon the verge of forty, and I did not feel myself disposed to fulfil the supposed duty of providing an heir for my estate. I had a brother,—an unhappy one !—but I could not entirely forego

the hope that he might still become worthy of the stock from whence he sprung. He was many years younger than myself; and I could please myself with the thought that a virtuous wife might be, in the hands of Providence, one of the means by which he might return from the error of his ways. I was willing to retain the power of making such a step easy to him whenever I could lead him to take it. He knew that this was my wish: but my hopes faded day by day; at length they appeared to be extinct;— I was informed that he was dead! My grief was poignant, for I had fondly loved him, and — but excuse me — I cannot say more! It was here, — it was in the very spot where you, madam, are now sitting, that the voice of friendship and of reason first taught me to assuage my sorrows, to abate my agonizing fears! I was told that

‘when we determine what is the *least* that is necessary to salvation, we make a law for Heaven;’ and I was warned not to lose ‘my charity and my happiness together, by a presumptuous judgment.’ I was not deaf to the wisdom and goodness which thus poured wine and oil into my wounds; I was induced to quit for a time my home, and to seek by new objects some obliteration of the one which was too constantly for my peace before my eyes. I found it to my cost!

“How, madam, shall I tell *you* such a tale?—how shall I wound your purity by the knowledge of vice and of degradation? Innocent and lovely as my Catherine now is, and not older, did her mother appear, when, with a readiness of compliance which flattered my self-love, and which I mistook for an affection correspondent to my own, she became my wife. Then it was that I wrote in grateful raptures

to my friends here, to thank them for a counsel which had conducted me to perfect happiness! — words vain and presumptuous! A little interval, and I was to present to them this inestimable jewel,—a little interval that was to be spent in an excursion on the Continent. It was the first request that my bride had made me; and I had reason afterwards to conclude that a childish desire to see foreign countries had been the real motive that had influenced the frank acceptance of my offered hand,—an acceptance which I had so vainly imputed to a passion as ardent as my own.

I was too much in love to be quick-sighted in discovering any blemishes in an object so lovely; all that was short of, or contrary to what I had pictured to myself, I imputed to the giddiness and spirits of youth, and I did not forget that three or four and forty, and eighteen, could not in all things think alike.

I began to reflect that I was really old enough to be the father of the creature whom I had made my wife, and that I should be absurd to desire that her taste for pleasure and novelty should not out-run mine. I was sensible that I owed her not only the attentions of a lover, but the indulgence of a parent ; and moreover I was not willing that she should recognize me in the latter character by any restraint that I put on her inclinations. The period of travelling was lengthened at her request ; but I grew alarmed when I found that the desire for dissipation, and the appetite for admiration, grew by what it fed on. She had become a mother !—but she had not become maternal. I felt it to be my duty to stop her short in a career which I too truly feared would lead to her destruction—painful duty, to thwart the wishes of those we love !

I announced to her my intention of returning home. It was met by remonstrance; and when the remonstrance was made in vain, was resented by sullenness and tears. I was but the more confirmed in the necessity of enforcing my determination. The very day on which we were to leave Naples was fixed, when I learnt that my poor unhappy brother still lived!—But how lived?—Again I must entreat you to spare me.

“Every consideration could not but give way to the urgent call that was upon me. I opened my agonized bosom to my wife. I implored her to consider the temporary withdrawal of my protection but as a new stimulant to the care of herself. I pointed out the dangers by which she was surrounded, the entire shipwreck that must be inevitable to both, if she neglected to guard herself against them. She was sof-

tened — she wept — she promised. I believed her sincere ; I tried to confide in the strength of her resolution, and — we parted !

“ Half my property was scarcely a sufficient sacrifice to avert the fate that hung over the head of my unhappy brother had I not interposed ; but the sacrifice was trivial in my eyes. I had seen him penitent, I had regained his love ; his last breath had expired in my arms ! I could appeal to my father and to my God that I had done my duty !

“ I returned with all the haste in my power to my wife and child, hoping to reconcile the one to the lessened fortunes to which she must now conform ; and so to bring up the other as to make her grateful to her parent for that very diminution.

“ I returned, but I returned to desolation ! the cruel spoiler had availed

himself of my absence, and of such an absence ! to rifle of its sweets my best, my dearest treasure ! My wife had deserted my house, and had abandoned her child ! It was not difficult for me to trace her guilty retreat. I tore her from it ! I acquainted her family with what had happened, and, disclaiming all vindictive measures, I offered to conduct her to them, and to leave her under their protection with an ample provision for all her wants. Her absence from my house had been so short, and I had taken care so securely to veil the name of her betrayer, that she might have passed her life under the parental roof without any very heavy imputation on her fame. A disagreement between persons of such different ages would have been easily believed, and I was willing to have taken a full share of the censure, as the cause of it. Can you believe it, madam ?

the paternal door was shut against her! From that moment I renounced the rights of a husband, and assumed those of a parent. Alas! it required all the tenderness of one to find consolation for the unhappy victim of seduction!

“Returned from a moment of fatal delirium to a just sense of her fault; the upbraidings of her heart, and the conviction of the value of the happiness that she had thrown away, wrought in her so sharp a sorrow that had she been left alone to its workings, the period would have been as short as it was severe — but she was not so left!

“I explained my intentions towards her. I gave it to her choice, whether she would be established under my eye, and within the reach of my protection; or whether she would choose a home for herself, and trust to her future conduct to create herself friends. She did not hesitate: at the very moment when

we *could* henceforth be *only friends*, it was her misfortune to begin really to love me. I withdrew her and myself from the observation and knowledge of all who had ever before known her. It was believed by every one, but her own family, that she was dead. The ambiguous expression that ‘I had lost my wife,’ maintained even my dear friends at Eagle’s Crag, in the same error.

“ I placed her and her child in an habitation in the closest vicinity, but apart, from the small domicile which I had fixed on for myself, in the environs of a provincial town in the South of France ; and there assuming the name, as I resolved to perform the duties of a father to her, I determined to dedicate the remainder of my life to the care and education of my *two* children. I sold my paternal property in this country ; great part of this sacrifice had become necessary ; and as I

could not contemplate any probability when I should wish to return to what small remnant might be left, I found it more consonant to the uses that I should in future have for money, to reduce it to a form that would be always tangible.

“The destitution which took place at Eagle’s Crag a short time afterwards, took from me the only regret that had ever interfered with my sense of the propriety of the measure I had pursued. I corresponded with Mr. Willoughby to the last hour of his life. He knew the inmost recesses of my heart in every feeling that dwelt there, with the exception only of those which belonged to the secret of another ; and the dejection that he could not but discover there, he could easily account for, by the sorrows which had attended my last interview with my ever-beloved brother, and by the loss (by death as

he supposed) of a creature whom he well knew I had loved, 'not wisely, but too well.'

"But when, by the lamented death of that best of friends, every link in the chain of my former existence was broken, I became known and alive only to the two helpless and unprotected objects of my care and my love, whom I had buried in the South of France, from the view of every human eye that could recognize them as compatriots.

"The years passed on, and did not pass wholly without something which at times wore the face of happiness. My Catherine grew 'sweet to every sense,' and her unhappy mother, in the delight which she afforded her, and the fervent and grateful affection that she bore to me, could at times lose part of her too keen regret for the higher felicity which she had once had within her power.

“ Catherine was now growing into womanhood, and her mother earnestly implored me, that she might be informed of the truth of our relative situations, and of the unhappy cause that had produced our estrangement. I resisted her earnestness for some time, unwilling that she should weaken in any degree the claims that she had upon the reverence and love of her daughter, established, as they justly were, by a series of years of the most exemplary conduct, and the most maternal fondness. I dreaded also the effect that such a disclosure would have upon the spirits and feelings of Catherine; but I yielded at length, when the fading complexion, and decreasing strength of the mother, seemed but too surely to confirm her prognostics that she should not long survive.

“ ‘ Bereave me not,’ said she, ‘ of the

consolation my wounded conscience will receive by a sincere confession of my crime to my daughter. Allow me the satisfaction of dying in the belief that, as a warning, I may be of use to my child ; although, as an example, I cannot be so. And oh ! above all let her once hear me call you my husband ! Once let me see her embrace you as her father !

“ It was a petition not to be withstood. The disclosure was made ! The recognition was completed ! And soon afterwards the mother and the wife sunk into the grave ! ”

Here Mr. Parr paused ; and Isabella, covering her face with her handkerchief, gave way to a flood of tears.

“ I pain you, madam,” resumed Mr. Parr ; “ and I have no right to do so. Forgive me for having made you a sharer in my sorrow ; but I could not otherwise acquit myself of the

obligation that I had incurred not to expose you to a connexion, which an after knowledge of my past life might cause you to repent having formed. I have little more to add. I had now no motive for concealing myself from observation. I had every reason to put an end to my banishment from my native country; and I had the most powerful inducements to seek, by an entire change of scene, some relief to the intense feelings which the painful disclosure, and the death of her unhappy mother, had occasioned my poor Catherine.

“The cheerfulness of youth had already drooped under an unremitted rumination on what she had heard, and what she had witnessed; and I had but too much reason to fear that her health would also give way. But where could we go? I had been too long estranged from every former con-

nexion, to hope that I could renew the ties of society with pleasure. My character was changed : I dreaded to expose the opening beauties and the tender virtues of my Catherine to the sunshine or the chill of a flattering and cold-hearted world. My whole soul revolted from introducing her to those unnatural relations who had refused protection and consolation to her unfortunate mother. My first care was to shelter her even from their notice. How deep were now my lamentations that Eagle's Crag was desolate. Yet all my wishes, all my thoughts, hovered around its neighbourhood. I could not bear to think of a *home* in any other spot on the whole face of the globe. I was resolved, if possible, to purchase a few acres in a vicinity so endeared to me by the remembrance of happiness now for ever gone !

“ I was willing to hope that some sprouts from its root might spring up for my Catherine. At least, that in the seclusion and obscurity in which I proposed to live, she might be secure from temptation and from falsehood. *She* had no choice ; for she knew no world beyond the narrow boundary within which she had been reared. She had none to lament but those whom she could never rejoin in this world. She had none to love but me, for she knew no one else. She might truly say with Ruth, ‘ Where thou goest I will go ; where thou lodgest I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people ; and thy God my God.’

“ Fell-beck was to be sold : I bought it, and built on its sunny bank the cottage that you, madam, have seen. Here, with one faithful servant, who had nursed my daughter’s mother in her infancy, who had not deserted her in her misfortune, and who had fol-

lowed her to the grave, we took up our abode. Our accommodations were of the simplest kind. I had long been indifferent to accommodation; and Catherine thought not of it. By narrowing our necessary expenses within the smallest possible bounds, that did not exclude the comforts and the decencies of life, we obtained a superfluity of means to answer the higher gratifications that our intellectual or our moral tastes might demand. We had chosen a cottage for our habitation, and we became cottagers.

“ Here we have now resided nearly five years; and here I should have been well content to dwell unknown and unconnected until the final scene which will shut from my eyes all that is mortal, had I had only myself to think of. But what was to become of Catherine when I was no more. Any succeeding moment—in the twinkling of an eye—she might become alone, un-

protected, unfriended! My heart reproached me unceasingly with my neglect to secure her from a destiny so desolate and so terrific. But I knew not where to find, I knew not where to seek, the shelter that was so necessary. Nor was my uneasiness confined to my apprehensions for the future. I saw a character insensibly forming in my poor Catherine the directly reverse of the one best fitted to perform the duties of this working-day world, and the least susceptible of relishing the happiness that it can afford. So silent!—so abstracted!—so unearthly! Formed for and capable of exercise and exertion, she would, but at my suggestion to the contrary, have passed whole days in some sedentary occupation, or in pensive thought.

“ Her looks commercing with the skies;
Her wrapt soul sitting in her eyes.”

“ Too well I knew of whom and on

what she thought! Was I a second time to see the mind wear out the body? Were the virtues of the daughter to be as fatal to me as had been the failings of the mother? Was I to survive *both* my children?

“Inured as I was to sorrow, and little of gladness that I could anticipate for this last object of my tenderness, I will acknowledge that my soul was in tumults when I thought of the moment that would take her from me. Strange contradiction to all that we profess to hope and believe!

“I conceived that I could with rapture have suffered martyrdom to have made her happy; I shrunk from the single stroke that would have confirmed her so unchangeably through an eternity of ages!

“But I grow talkative; pardon me; it is long since my heart has dared to give vent to its feelings.

“ It was at the moment when my fears for the present, and my apprehensions for the future, were at the most painful height, that I learnt that Eagle’s Crag was again about to receive an inhabitant. How eagerly did I seek after, and listen to, every varying note of rumour which told of the whom and the how ! It conveyed at length the truth ; and, with such particulars of commendation, as seemed to open an accomplishment to my wishes ; but I too fatally knew, excuse me, madam, how the graces of youth and beauty may be mistaken for the virtues they represent. My *all* was at stake ! I could not be too cautious : yet I had an almost superstitious conviction,—for which of us is not superstitious ?—that the walls of Eagle’s Crag must sanctify whomsoever they inclosed ; and I had soon reason to suppose that it was not merely on so

shadowy a belief that I should be called to justify the temerity I meditated. Some circumstances reached me that—again I have to ask your pardon; in resolving to be unreserved, I am in danger of becoming impertinent—my resolution was taken, and had you not so happily anticipated my purpose, many days would not have elapsed before you had seen me a mendicant at your gate, with my daughter in my hand.

“You now, madam, know who, and what I am; you are the repository of events and thoughts which no other now existing creature is so fully informed of as yourself. You understand what I have the presumption to wish from you, to ask of you; and it now belongs to you to determine whether you will allow my daughter and myself a probationary claim upon your society and kindness, or whether the first

day of our intercourse shall be the last."

Isabella scarcely suffered Mr. Parr to finish the last words of this sentence; with impatience speaking in every feature of the face, she started from her chair, and stretching out her hand to Mr. Parr,

"Receive this," said she, "as a pledge that while I have a roof to shelter me, or a protection to afford, your admirable — your beloved Catherine shall want neither one nor the other. Be witness," added she, looking around her, "be witness for me every sacred memorial of the friendship once so precious to you, that I claim the privilege, inefficient as I maybe, to supply the friends whom you have lost; of giving you back the rights that once were yours at Eagle's Crag!"

Mr. Parr bent one knee to the

ground, fervently pressing the hand of Isabella, which he retained in both his own.

“ In this posture,” said he, “ let me return thanks to the fountain of all good, and to the effulgent emanation of his nature which stands before me, for that lightening of apprehension, that inspiration of hope, which will mark the present moment from all that has preceded it — from all that can come after it. The *piety* of gratitude can only be adequate to such blessings !”

“ Oh rise ! — pray rise !” said Isabella. “ You overpower me ; you make me ill !” added she, as she sunk upon a chair.

“ It is thus that the inhabitants of earth meet the joys of Heaven !” said Mr. Parr. “ Our souls are too high set. — Let us seek Catherine in the gallery : she will not be surprised that

we have left her there so long, for she knew my purpose ; but it is a place too congenial to her aspirations to suffer her to remain there longer than necessary.”

Isabella ordered lights and coffee into the library, and willingly accompanied Mr. Parr in search of Catherine.

They found her contemplating the picture of Lady Margaret Willoughby, on which there were still sufficient rays of reflected light to make the features and countenance visible. She turned from it on the approach of her father, as if afraid of awakening in his mind the too painful remembrance of one of whom she had heard him speak so fondly.

“ You cannot look too long, or too attentively, on that portrait,” said Mr. Parr. “ It represents all that a woman ought to be, and all that she would wish to be.”

“ And she finished her pilgrimage at six and thirty!” said Catherine, with a tone expressive of her sense of the beatitude of so early a consummation.

“ It is the privilege of humanity to die,” said Mr. Parr; “ but it is the duty of virtue to live; and it is a duty, my dear Catherine,” added he, with a smile, “ that I enjoin you to perform.”

“ And I also,” said Isabella; “ for know, my dear Catherine, that I am now allowed to embrace you as a friend, and I have a great many offices for you to perform in that capacity, that will not permit you to escape us these hundred years to come.”

“ We are entered on our probation, Catherine,” said Mr. Parr. “ Be it the care of both to acquit ourselves well.”

Thus conversing, they returned to light, and to the library; and now it was that Isabella was struck by the change

that had taken place on Mr. Parr's brow. The cloud of anxiety which had rested on it through every varying change of conversation was gone. It was lighted up with the beams of pleasure and of gratitude, as his eye glanced from Catherine to herself; fresh agility seemed to be communicated to every movement; while the juvenility of his spirit made Catherine frequently turn towards him with a look of doubt whether it was her father that was seated by her side.

And is this my work? thought Isabella. Oh! who can deny themselves the delight of making others happy!

The hours seemed to be winged; there was no break, no pause in the conversation. All Mr. Parr's superiority of intellect were by skill so familiarized to the conception and knowledge of his two youthful companions, that even Catherine forgot her usual

character of listener, and mingled with gaiety and readiness in the conversation. It was not possible that any three persons could be more pleased with each other. It will indeed be my own fault, thought Isabella, if I am not better and wiser for my residence at Eagle's Crag!

Isabella had appointed Catherine's chamber to be adjoining to her own; she accompanied her to it when they retired to bed.

“My dear Miss Parr,” said she, shewing her the communicating door, “this entrance will always be open to you; your father has honoured me by in some degree recommending you to my care. I am too young to be your directress; but while your father will not disdain to superintend us both, neither will want any other guide—we must be friends, and I have been told that it is the duty and privilege of

friendship to guard its objects from every tendency to evil. I bespeak your correction of all that you may see amiss in me."

"Oh, my dear madam!" said Catherine, throwing her arms round Isabella's neck, "*I correct you!* you, who seem to me a being of a superior order! you, that have restored a degree of happiness to my father which I never before saw him possess! oh, I can only bow before you in love and gratitude; never, never shall I believe that you can err!"

"Yet you must believe it, my dear Catherine," said Isabella, kissing her, "because it is *truth*; and because you will not have known me twenty-four hours, before you will see that it is so; and so good night, but we must not part to-morrow."

Isabella repeated this prohibition to Mr. Parr at the breakfast table; he

submitted as to Catherine, but he asserted that he must himself return home. At this proposal Catherine looked aghast. "And leave me, father?" "and leave you, Catherine," returned he calmly; "my dear, it is not the law of nature that a parent and a child should be one and indivisible—be not alarmed, my love; no day will pass without my seeing you—nor more, if Mrs. Willoughby will allow me to limit her kindness, on this first experiment, than two before you return to Fell-beck." "It is a nestling," said he, addressing Isabella, "that must be weaned by degrees."

Catherine acquiesced, but her rising bosom, and the tear in her eye, shewed the sacrifice that she made.

Many were the reflections that Mr. Parr's pathetic and disastrous story gave rise to in Isabella's bosom; but none that came so home to her per-

sonal feelings, as the comment that it furnished to that maxim of Lady Rachel's, which asserted that the virtue of a wife had no safeguard so impregnable as the love for her husband. She could now look back upon moments of mortification, of resentment, and of excited vanity, which she trembled but to think of — she could feel that she had known the instant

“ When slighted Virtue, quits her slipp'ry reign,
And Pride and Prudence take her seat in vain ;
The Guardians yield, by force superior ply'd,
By Interest, Prudence, and by Flattery, Pride.”

And when all the defences that she had ever been taught to raise against degradation were levelled before her ; and when she was preserved alone by that conjugal love, which she had never been instructed to consider as necessary to the formation of the marriage bond. With how much consolation and thankfulness did she now hug it to

her heart ! and how fervently did she resolve to preserve it unfaded and unfading through all the bitter trials that neglect, or even abandonment, might expose it to !

CHAP. XXVII.

“ I do note,
How grief and patience, rooted in her, both
Mingle their spurs together.”

SHAKSPEARE.

FROM this period there was no day without some intercourse between Eagle's Crag and Fell-beck; and Catherine came to consider it as a matter only to be decided by the circumstance of the hour, whether she remained at the one, or returned to the other; but were the ladies left together, or were they accompanied by Mr. Parr, every

passing hour was marked by a succession of amusing or improving occupations. Catherine communicated to Isabella her greater store of scientific knowledge, and Isabella led Catherine to higher perfection in the knowledge of the use of the pencil, or the touch of the instrument. In one particular, however, the balance of obligation was wholly on Catherine's side. Isabella had increased the happiness of Catherine an hundred-fold. She had exhilarated her spirits; she had broken in upon her abstractions; she had opened her mind to all the youthful visions of joy and hope; her perspective still terminated in heaven; but she could now contemplate with satisfaction the joys and the duties that lay in the way. Never did Isabella repress the rising cheerfulness of her friend by suffering a hint to escape her of the sense of early disappointment, which lay so

heavily at her heart. If Mr. Parr, thought she, has been able to preserve his philanthropy, and his relish for society, through sorrows and ill usage such as he has endured, shall I become a calumniator of the goodness of God in his appointments to man, because I have not all that my fond heart pants for, or that my self-love accounts my due?

But it was not even reflections, such as these, that could enable Isabella to derive from the society of Catherine all the happiness which she had communicated to her companion.

It is true that her solitary hours were cheered and enlivened by her new friends; and it is equally true that a large share of the pleasure that she bestowed was reflected on her own breast; but all was insufficient to sooth the anxieties, to obliterate the mortifications,

or to repress the fears that now every succeeding day gave birth to.

Isabella had seen the glories of August, and the beauties and labours of September pass away, in the continually disappointed expectation of the arrival of Mr. Willoughby; nor had the variations of such a suspense been softened by any regularity of their intercourse by letters. Small as the pleasure had been that she had ever received from such intercourse, it was now considerably lessened. On her own part she had continued weekly to give an account of the health and progress of her boy; and to transmit a short detail of the proceedings and events at Eagle's Crag; mingling with each, as much of her own feelings and occupations as would not leave Mr. Willoughby ignorant either of her thoughts or her actions, in as great a degree to the full, as he

now seemed to concern himself with either. On the two former points her communications were always equally complete and regular; on the latter she was more or less diffuse according to the style or frequency of the epistles which she received from Mr. Willoughby. But nothing could be more variable in both their particulars, than those letters were now become.

Sometimes they would arrive for several successive posts together; at others a fortnight would elapse without any. Some would be written in strains of the fondest affection both to Isabella and his boy; and would be fraught with the strongest expressions of impatience to rejoin them. Through these ran a vein of dejection and unhappiness, and a half expressed longing to repose his sorrows in some sympathizing bosom: then he would break off short, give his expressions a gay turn,

and leave it doubtful how far he had been in earnest in any thing that he had said. If Isabella, induced by such glimpses into what seemed to be passing in her husband's mind, ventured gently to urge her claim to his confidence, she invariably observed that his next letter was evidently written under a stricter guard against any such lapses; and by his perfect inadvertence to any desire on her part to be partaker in this uneasiness, she could not doubt, but that it was unacceptable to him. But the greater part of his letters were little more than acknowledgments of the receipt of hers; orders to Roberts, and complaints of the delays and vexations which he found in settling his business; and neither in the one or the other could she discover the nature of this business, nor could trace his occupations, nor the society in which he lived. The letters were sometimes dated from Brighton,

sometimes from the house in town; and sometimes, but this was rarely, from Beechwood. From such a correspondence, if she could derive neither comfort nor information, she thought she found intimations of its source in the style of Lady Rachel's letters to her; and she believed it to be such as forbad her too eagerly to wish for an elucidation, probably more painful than the obscurity in which she felt herself lost.

There was more of softness, more of commiseration in Lady Rachel's manner of writing than she generally allowed herself, let the subject be what it would, or the person whom she addressed be ever so dear to her. In return to Isabella's communication of the friendship which she had formed with Mr. Parr and his daughter, Lady Rachel had fully confirmed the favourable opinion that Isabella had expressed

of the character of the former ; and had said, “ hold fast the acquisition that you have made : a friend is born for adversity.” She had, however, added nothing to the information that Isabella had received from Mr. Parr, and which Isabella had not thought herself at full liberty to detail even to Lady Rachel, except that the mother of Catherine was a Scotch woman ; and that from thence probably arose the predilection that had been shewn by the daughter to the Scotch garment, and mode of head-dress, which had struck Isabella as singular, and not easily accountable for in one who seemed in general to shun every thing that could draw observation upon her.

Thus, while Isabella received little exhilaration from the letters of Lady Rachel, her conversations with Mr. Roberts were not more consolatory. A gloom rested on his brow ; and

there was a sadness in his accent, even when he would force himself to say, “Madam, we must hope the best.” “My honoured Lady, all may be well.” “My Master will be here one of these days yet.”

But Isabella began now to believe that this day would never come. The shades of October were far advanced, and she was still a prey to the cruel fluctuations of hope and disappointment that the uncertainty and impenetrableness of Mr. Willoughby subjected her to. She heard seldom from her mother or sisters; and their letters were wholly filled with details of their own schemes and plans—of the balls, the parties, the beaux and the belles, which took up so much of their time, as scarcely left them leisure to inquire how Isabella continued to like a course of life so different from their own. Once or twice, indeed, there was a hint from

Lady Jane, that she “did not understand such seclusion ;” “that perhaps Isabella did not consider how her interests might be undermining ;” “but that she was not one to interfere between man and wife.”

Isabella could not but understand such inuendos as disadvantageous to Mr. Willoughby, but they could be to no purpose but to increase her dejection, and new edge her fears. She wondered that her mother had not forborne them !

In vain was her growing attachment to Catherine ; in vain were all the efforts of Mr. Parr to lighten that load of thought, which she considered herself as bound to confine to her own breast. It weighed upon her without intermission, and deprived her of all power to exhilarate others, or be exhilarated herself. She saw plainly that nothing of all this escaped the penetra-

tion of Mr. Parr : but he betrayed neither his conjectures, nor his knowledge, otherwise than by multiplied endeavours to amuse and to sustain her. His manners were become those of a tender parent ; and it would have been difficult to have known, as he exerted himself to charm the progress of the evening hours, which of the two lovely creatures to whose amusement he dedicated himself, had the greater right to call him parent.

Thus, thought Isabella, did he once before, forgetting the wrongs of the husband, assume the character of a tender father, to an erring wife ! Let it be another call upon me to be, that which I ought to be ; that my failure may not inflict a second wound upon the heart of this benevolent, this suffering being !

There was, indeed, one distinction in Mr. Parr's address to Isabella, that

could not escape her observation. It was marked with a respect amounting sometimes to little short of sacred reverence. Such was the impression that he had received in contemplating a heart so pure,—a mind so powerful,—and a devotion to her duties so disinterested, in a creature so young, and so deserted.

Had Morna been an Isabella! was the thought of every moment; and his sigh for the one was the deeper, and his admiration of the other the more glowing!

CHAP. XXVIII.

“ The heart’s affection,—secret thing !
Is like the cleft rock’s ceaseless spring,
Which free and independent flows,
Of summer’s sun, or winter’s snows ;
The fox-glove from its side may fall,
The heath-bloom fade, or moss-flowers white ;
But still its runlet, bright, though small,
Will issue sweetly to the light.”

BAILLIE.

THE second week in November was now arrived ; and Isabella meditated whether she ought not to assume the courage to require of Mr. Willoughby an explicit avowal of his purposes for

himself, and his wishes for her. She doubted whether the passive state in which she was remaining did not violate Lady Rachel's admonition; "be not afraid to act; whatever else he is, your husband is not a tyrant."

Perhaps, thought Isabella, I shall be accountable for any errors that my apparent unconsciousness of the offences committed against me may occasion. I may be thought indifferent; acquiescent! Yet may not expostulation irritate? May it not provoke an open avowal of that which is at present shaded? should I be chased from Eagle's Crag!

Her full heart seemed bursting at the very thought.

Alas, I am a coward! I *am* afraid to act! oh how a sense of my own weakness aggravates the injuries of others!

The desire, the almost necessity that she felt for some support beyond

her own strength, and the relief of disburthening her mind, made the temptation to confide her doubts and her griefs to Mr. Parr, almost irresistible. Inclination could suggest much sophistry to justify, and even to recommend such a confidence. She found herself involved in a labyrinth of what appeared to her a contrariety of duties. But she caught the clue of that simple and explicit obligation, “not to expose the weaknesses and failings of her husband ;” and extricated herself from the danger she was in. The blush of shame was on her cheek, when, having gained this vantage ground, she looked back upon the hazard she had been in, of incurring the disgrace of establishing a confidence, that she would not have dared to own to the man whom she was bound not only to love, but to honour and obey !

Strengthening herself to endure all

that she ought to endure, she resolved to be determined alone by her own sense of what was right ; and to take the responsibility, and the consequence of what she should do upon herself alone.

Her usual companions were absent ; and she had appointed in her own mind, the night and the hour when this momentous, this terrific letter was to be written : when she was to appear in a new light to her husband ; when she was to assume rights ! when she was to call for explanations !

She wondered at her own temerity : and again she felt it more tolerable to endure the rack to which she was bound, than to demand the stroke that was to put an end, perhaps, at once to her torture, and her hope !

Her mind remained for some time in a state of the most excruciating irresolution ; but having by a train of

deductions, both from the past and the present, arrived at almost a certainty that she was not only neglected, but supplanted, she foresaw, in such an usurpation, consequences to her offspring of so tremendous a nature, that she conceived herself bound to avert them if possible, at whatever cost to herself—she adopted then firmly the resolution to throw the die, on the cast of which seemed to depend the happiness, or the misery of her life.

There was, however, *one* more inlet through which a ray of hope might dart: she might that very night receive the wished-for intelligence of the approach of Mr. Willoughby. His silence had been unusually long; it might be broken by all that she wished to hear!

With beating heart, and trembling limbs, she awaited the moment of deci-

sion : it came—and brought with it, a letter from her husband !

She caught it eagerly : but with her finger on the seal, she had not courage to break it ; so much did she dread the words, “ pray tell Roberts.”—Suspense could, however, be endured no longer ; she burst open the paper, averting her eyes, when they were arrested at the same moment by the expression,

“ I am the happiest of men ! my dearest love, I shall be with you in less than five days from the date of this. I shall embrace you ! I shall behold my boy ! Your steady soul, my dear Isabella, cannot enter into the tumults of mine in this expectation ; but you have no notion of the impediments, the contrarieties, that have so harassed me. All has gone on smoothly with you—but *I have escaped !* and if I can but be true to myself, I shall find at Eagle’s Crag a shelter from every future dan-

ger. God preserve you my dearest love! I would my arms were around you at this moment!”

Isabella could not believe her senses! yet it was,—yes, it was the hand writing of Mr. Willoughby! but the style! the feelings! oh, how foreign from all to which she had been accustomed! He even seemed to reproach her with indifference! She who had been so often chilled, even by the simple thought that her love was of no value to him! What had wrought the change? To what escape does he allude? No matter: he has broken his chains, whatever they were! he will rejoin me! Now I shall not be afraid to let him see how dear, how inexpressibly dear he is to me! he will see that *he*, at least can shake my steady soul! Oh, how little do I deserve or covet such a praise, when his happiness, his love is in

question ! But we shall be again together, and all will be well !

Visions of delight unthought of before floated in the brain of Isabella ; she could not but be sensible of the extraordinary growth which had taken place in all her powers within the last few months ; she could not but feel that she was worthy of being the confidante and the counsellor of her husband ; that in claiming his love, she offered a full equivalent in revealing her own.

“ Hitherto he may have considered me as a child ; the object of indulgence alone ; henceforth he shall know me as a friend ; as the being that can suffer both with him, and for him ! and this without the necessity of uttering one word of reproach ; of wounding him by acknowledging that I have been wounded myself. Oh God, I thank thee ! ”

Isabella summoned Mr. Roberts to partake of her joy. She gave fifty orders for more accommodation than would have been necessary for a monarch and his train ; she made a thousand inquiries into the minutest particulars as to what Mr. Willoughby had been accustomed to have : she called Evans : she hurried to her nursery ; she embraced and wept over the little Godfrey ; in a word, she betrayed to her whole household, by her joy in the expectation of her husband, the sorrow which she had so carefully veiled, that his absence had occasioned her.

“ I could not have believed all this,” said Mr. Roberts, solemnly, to Mrs. Evans ; “ I have thought my Lady a most wonderful personage, but I could not have thought that she loved my master so beyond all bounds.”

“ Ah, Mr. Roberts,” returned Mrs. Evans, “ you would never believe me,

that my Lady had a breaking heart under that composed countenance."

Isabella arose early in the morning, and surprised her friends at Fell-beck, by her appearance at their breakfast table.

"Mr. Willoughby is coming," said she, as she entered their room. "He may be here on Wednesday,—to-morrow,—to day,—any time ; you say, my dear Mr. Parr, that you have not seen him since he was a boy. Oh, I hope you will think him like his father ! and I am sure he will love and reverence you as one, if you will permit him, for indeed he has a kind heart, and an affectionate one,—every body says so !" forgetting, in her eagerness to make his eulogium, that she was making his apology too.

Catherine's eyes sparkled with pleasure at the happiness of her friend ;

and Mr. Parr congratulated her with the tenderness of a parent.

“What a happy man is Mr. Willoughby!” said he, with a sigh. “But, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, you must compose yourself. I scarcely thought that you could have been so transported.”

“Oh, but you do not know; you cannot guess——.” Isabella stopped; for the secret of all her past wretchedness was about to escape her. “Indeed,” added she, recollecting herself, “I did not know myself of half the vexations and impediments with which Mr. Willoughby has been obliged to struggle before he could rejoin me; but now I hope we shall be able to indemnify him for them all.”

Isabella having thus communicated her joy to her friends, could not bear to be another moment from Eagle’s Crag; for her fervid imagination re-

presented to her that Mr. Willoughby might even be already there.

“ You will be so kind as to let us have the earliest intelligence of the arrival of Mr. Willoughby,” said Mr. Parr ; “ we shall not come to Eagle’s Crag until we know that you have met ; for well says the wise man, ‘ a friend and a companion can never meet amiss ; but above both is a wife with her husband’ .”

“ It is a joy,” said Isabella, “ that I have never known before, for till now we have never been parted.”

Away flew Isabella, and left Mr. Parr to ruminate on all that had come to his knowledge ; and to tremble for the disappointment that he feared might be preparing for Isabella.

CHAP. XXIX.

“Naughty lady!

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“I have prov’d a thousand——
Hearts?

I think so. ——

Not one! —the time may come thou may’st.”

BYRON.

Mr. Willoughby might well say that he had had an escape. Not all his experience in what is called the “*ways of the world*,” had been sufficient to preserve him from a danger into

which he had run, precisely because he believed that he was stronger than his enemy. A single doubt of his own self-command would have saved him, for Mr. Willoughby was incapable of premeditated baseness; all his aspirations were on the side of virtue; never did Mr. Willoughby *purpose* to do evil. Hence believing himself safe in his *wishes*, the mischief had generally been incurred before he was aware of his inclination to it. No previous precaution had veiled any part of the undesigned aberration; and thus with virtue in his heart, and vice in his actions, he could not escape from the reproach of inconsequence, but at the cost of the more injurious stigma of hypocrisy. An alternation of sinning and repenting had left him, at this period of his life, the sport of every blast of temptation, and all that he now did rightly, was but the sha-

dow of virtue, which like the steps of a spirit left no trace behind it ; while all that he did amiss, made him but the more incapable of doing otherways.

Thus, when from his marriage, the great epoch of his life, he resolved to date an entire dereliction of all that might hitherto have been wrong ; nothing was more consonant to the generous feelings of his heart, or to his moral sense of rectitude, than that he should be one of the kindest and most faithful of husbands : and, having sacrificed what he was sensible was an ill-placed passion for Lady Charlotte Stanton, to the more rational preference of the milder character of Isabella, he believed that he had given such a proof of self-command, as ought to exonerate him from all fear of any future influence that the powerful attractions of Lady Charlotte might still have over his fancy.

But Mr. Willoughby had been too much used to a life of excitement, to be able at once to rest satisfied with the calm and regular happiness of domestic bliss.

No sooner were the transports of the first days of his marriage past, than a sense of vacuity ensued; yet in returning to the more varied scenes of general life, he meant not so much that they should supersede either the duties or the pleasures of his new engagement, as that they should add to the one, and support him in the discharge of the other. While he poured out his fortune at the feet of Isabella; while he left her will the sole arbitress of her actions; while he felt kind, and was certain that he was faithful; his conscience made him no reproach for the small proportion that she engaged either of his time or his thoughts. Nor was he more alive to

the hazard of a mode of conduct towards others, which the example of so many around him sanctioned; and which, not proceeding from any evil design in himself, he could not but regard as innocent. If there *were* any deviations into a more marked attention to any particular person, than even the indulgence of a licentious world allows, it was only in *trifles*, which could carry no consequence with them.

So he flattered himself; unaware as he was, that in these imagined trifles, like the locks of Sampson, lie the strength of vice!

He had accustomed himself to regard Lady Charlotte as a coquette who was more in his power, than he was in hers; and when, by the sordidness of her marriage, the whole motives of which he very shrewdly penetrated, she sunk still lower in his moral ap-

probation, he scarcely considered her otherways than as a very beautiful creature, with whom he might amuse himself as he thought fit, without any hazard of incurring a real attachment on his part, or blemishing the estimation that she held in the world.

Thus setting at defiance the power of Lady Charlotte, he threw himself perpetually into the circle of her charms; and knew not that he had tasted the enchanted cup, till he started at the transformation that he perceived in himself. His safety he knew to be in flight, but it was no longer in his power to fly; she had woven around him a web of so artful a structure, although of so imperceptible a texture, that he found himself impeded in every attempt to break from her society; while he was wholly unsuspecting that it was by her machinations that he was detained there.

Lady Charlotte, on quitting town, had established herself at Brighton. Mr. Dunstan had no ancestral domain to which Lady Charlotte could repair, there to swell her pride by appropriating to herself the honours that had been won by others ; or from whence she could tell of the Edwards and Henrys who had given names to all the narrow and inconvenient divisions of which those turrets were composed that had been honoured by their residence ; or who had trodden the high windowed and gloomy galleries, the echoes of which returned sounds from their steps, sufficient to appal the most unsuperstitious heart.

Wealth was Mr. Dunstan's sole distinction ; and to make this wealth answer all the purposes of vanity, was Lady Charlotte's sole purpose in every part of her domestic arrangement. Hence, every place which she inha-

bited was the temple of the most refined luxury ! the shrine of voluptuousness ! all that could seduce the senses, or dazzle the imagination, was around her ; and her motto was, “ Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds, before they are withered.”

Her mansion at Brighton was the resort of all that was gay and fashionable, witty, and unprincipled. There was to be found *the best company* : and to be received there *en famille*, was a distinction. It was a distinction *sought* in vain by many : it was *offered* to Mr. Willoughby ! but this distinguished favour seemed to proceed from Mr. Dunstan, not from Lady Charlotte.

Mr. Dunstan no longer fancied himself in love—Lady Charlotte had cured him of that folly ; but he was not the less under the influence of another still greater,—the folly of supposing that he derived honour from expending his

substance in a vain competition with his superiors in rank and fortune.

He had entered the world with one single ambition : the ambition of being known to the great and the fashionable. His mean to this end was also single : it consisted in wealth accumulated by his father. This was a circumstance little inquired into by those who drank his wine, eat his dinners, rode his horses, or made him keep theirs ; but it was never forgotten by himself ; and the pain attendant on the remembrance made it necessary that the blot in the escutcheon should be obliterated as soon as possible. He was resolved to fall in love with the first woman of rank whose liberality of sentiment would lead her to forget the obscurity of birth, in the notoriety of fortune. Lady Charlotte's charms had for a short time, and to as great a degree as Mr. Dunstan was capable of,

made that real, which, there were an hundred chances to one, must have been assumed ; and Mr. Dunstan had, what he called to himself, the unlooked for good luck of really liking the titled creature whom his ambition had decided that he must marry. He had already found a more than sufficient counterbalance for this luck, in the interior qualities of the object of his choice ; but all her external advantages remained the same. By her means he had become the son-in-law of an Earl ; he was known as the distinguished man, who had married the beautiful Lady Charlotte Stanton ; and he had the privilege of making presents to her sisters, and paying the debts of her brothers. Still more, her imprimature gave sterling fashion to what the fastidious might, without such a stamp, have thought no better than base metal ; Mr. Dunstan, who

in his strife with the meanness of his original, had thought the twenty-four hours of his existence, “*un jour manque*,” in which, with whatever pains or mortifications it might have been acquired, he had not been able to make the acquisition of “a valuable acquaintance,” could now repose upon his arms, could talk of his laurels, and could make his victories come home to him.

He was at the acme of his glory, although somewhat in the decline of his happiness, when Lady Charlotte chose Brighton as the theatre on which to display her own talents, and her husband's riches; and such was the strength of their united powers, that there was not a single individual in Brighton, or its vicinity, but such as could submit to the annihilation of “being quite out of the world,” who did not strain every nerve to be seen

at Lady Charlotte's parties, and to be invited to Mr. Dunstan's dinners. What was the reward of management in some, and the prize of effrontery in others, was offered to Mr. Willoughby gratuitously, and he was sought as giving distinction to those from whom all the rest of the world seemed to think that they derived it.

Nothing could be more simple than all this on the part of Lady Charlotte. He was her "old friend!"—he was her "new cousin!"—"they had always been in such habits of intimacy!"—"he was a poor widower,"—at present "quite on the *pavée*." And "he and Mr. Dunstan had known each other so long!"—neither wonder nor censure could attach to his being, as it were, domesticated with those to whom he was united by so many ties.

So Lady Charlotte designed that Mr. Willoughby should think; and so

Mr. Willoughby thought. His prudence slept upon its post ; while Lady Charlotte, not trusting wholly either to her charms, or to her flattery, to accomplish the overthrow which she meditated, at once of the honour and happiness of her victim, called in a third auxiliary, not less potent than either of the former.

Mr. Willoughby did not love play ; but he loved excitement, and was regardless of money ; and now, uneasy in his mind, and out of humour with himself from a consciousness of error, he was ready to fly to any resource which prevented him from looking within.

Amongst the varied attractions by which Lady Charlotte and Mr. Dunstan drew around them all that either made, or wished to make, “ the world of fashion,” the powerful stimulus of high play was not wanting. Lady

Charlotte had seen that Mr. Willoughby was not insensible to the feverish pleasure that this most irrational of all pastimes can communicate; she had seen it with pleasure during the memorable week that they had passed together some weeks before; and she had made use of this discovery to accelerate the ruin which she so much wished to accomplish; and towards which she was not unaware that the first steps were made already.

Mr. Willoughby's natural generosity had long degenerated into profuseness; what at first was a simple desire of gratification was become by indulgence a morbid disability to withstand the slightest inclination, at whatever expense it was to be satisfied. The consequence was not difficult to be foreseen, and would probably be immediate, if the operation of such weakness was aided by the quick process of

unsuccessful gaming. So would Isabella be thrown from the eminence on which it was gall and wormwood to Lady Charlotte to see her placed; and she knew that poverty would wring the soul of Mr. Willoughby to torture, not only from the pain of deprivation, but from the sense of degradation. The pleasure of revenge might then be hers. To this pleasure she could subordinate other purposes that she had in view; or might so blend them together as at once to be able to gratify what she called love, and to accomplish the downfall of Isabella, and the misery of Mr. Willoughby.

Nor did she fear that the dangerous engine of gambling which she had brought into play for such nefarious purposes should, by any re-action, bring on herself the ruin she had designed for others. Although not very prompt in allowing Mr. Dunstan the merit of

any tolerable qualities that he might possess, she felt a full reliance on his prudence.

Notwithstanding he might appear to bye-standers to pay high for the station that he maintained in the world, she was not afraid that he would be betrayed into a bad bargain ; and she considered the whist and the loo tables, not only as allurements which drew around her those who otherways might have stood aloof, but as a resource from whence the more substantial gratifications of the dinner table, were in part to be furnished. When Mr. Dunstan recounted to her these paltry and disgraceful gains, she did but despise him the more ; but such a feeling took nothing from her happiness, for love or honour had been no part of her bond ; and the source from whence they sprung promised permanency to those enjoyments for which alone she had con-

tracted it. Thus, without a fear of the consequences to herself, did she “drug the cup,” which she made Mr. Willoughby drink, with every poison that could corrupt his moral feeling, and every ingredient that could stimulate his vicious inclinations.

At the period when Isabella removed into Westmorland, Mr. Willoughby’s difficulties pressed closely upon him, and he could no longer shut his eyes to the necessity there was that some change in his manner of living must be made. He was not sorry that, by giving way to Isabella’s preference of Eagle’s Crag to Beechwood, he should be able to veil from her, at least for a time, the situation that his affairs were in; and he flattered himself that before he rejoined her, he should be able to make such arrangements as would spare her the pain and mortification under which he was himself suffering.

He parted from her with real regret ; and had he taken the wiser method of dealing openly with her, they might, perhaps, from that moment have dated their mutual happiness. But he regarded Isabella as a child ; a most engaging and amiable child it is true, but still a child ; and he could not be ignorant that she had become his wife merely on the ground of fulfilling the purpose for which she had been brought up, by forming a good establishment ; and he was not so unreasonable as to suppose himself the object of an affection that could withstand the disappointment, that the disclosures which he had to make must bring to all the visions of magnificence and distinction with which he concluded that all the preference that she could feel for him must be identified. He hated pain himself : he could not willingly inflict it upon others with-

out partaking of what he communicated in a very uneasy degree. He could least of all bear to inflict it upon a young and innocent creature who naturally looked up to him as the source of all the good that she could expect in life. On the integrity of Isabella he had an unshaken reliance; and he entertained a full sense of obligation to her for the mildness and cheerfulness with which she never failed to meet his every wish; but he had no confidence in the powers of her understanding, or the strength of her mind, from which he could hope assistance in removing his difficulties, or support to bear them.

She will but weep, thought he, and say that she is ready to do any thing that I wish; and I do not know what it is that I do wish.

Thus reasoning, he thought it therefore both wise and kind to keep her

in ignorance as long as possible of all that could make her uneasy ; or put to hazard that degree of esteem and approbation which he believed that she entertained for him.

It was his purpose, at the time when they parted, immediately to dispose of Beechwood, and to rejoin Isabella as soon as possible ; but the negotiations necessary to accomplish the first point, drew out into length. It was necessary that he should be near the spot, that he might be more easily consulted ; to wait in solitude at the house which was so soon to become the property of another, was impossible for a man of Mr. Willoughby's habits, and ungoverned feelings. He tried the experiment, and fretted himself into a nervous fever in a week. Brighton then became necessary, even as he believed, for his health ; and he told himself that he yielded rather to this ne-

cessity, than to the allurements that were held out to him there.

He heard from every mouth of the delightful establishment which Lady Charlotte had formed, and it could not be wondered at if he went rather to a place where he was sure to find himself surrounded by friends, and *good* company, than that he should content himself with the benefit that the sea might equally have afforded him in a situation of less public resort. How innocently might all this have been done! How guiltily was it done!

Yet Mr. Willoughby owed not his subjection, wholly or unitedly, to the bewitching charms of Lady Charlotte, or the demoralizing society and habits in which he now lived.

Mr. Willoughby was no novice in the allurements and the arts of beauty, or in the power of example. He had sometimes fallen before, and sometimes tri-

umphed over each. Lady Charlotte was aware of this, and she found it necessary to call to her assistance a more powerful agent than either, before she could bring about that fearful change in the feelings of the unfortunate Willoughby that he was about to experience.

When he had repaired to Brighton, he held Lady Charlotte but as he had always held her; a practised coquette; whose beauty pleased his senses, and whose freedom of manners allowed of equal freedom from him. He even conceived that his own respect for decorum was paramount to hers, and that she owed obligations to him that, however unwilling she might be to confess, she could not but feel. He was prepared for nothing so little as to find the free-principled, the unguarded, the seemingly cold-hearted Lady Charlotte, an observer of her

duties, a respecer of decorum, and the apparent victim of some secret sorrow. Yet no sooner was he domesticated in her house at Brighton, than her character seemed to have undergone this change.

To the general observation she might remain only what she had ever been, a most fascinating, but a most unprincipled woman ; but with Mr. Willoughby she had a tone of moral, of interest, and of friendship, which bespoke a heart of good and deep feeling. Whenever they were accidentally apart from others, she wore a sadness in her brow that told of a mind ill at ease ; and she seemed to regard all the splendor with which she was surrounded, not only with indifference but with disdain, as the object at once of her contempt and resentment. The contemptuous sarcasms and bitter taunts which in her

gayer moments she had seemed to take pleasure in, when speaking of her husband, had now given way to the expression of a more chastised, but more painful sense of her wretchedness in being his wife. Some fatal secret appeared as if about to break from her lips; some deprecation of the contempt that she acknowledged must attach to such a choice as she had made in a partner for life, in the motives that had led, or the impulse that had compelled her to it.

From her blushes, her sighs, her half words, her stifled emotions, the vanity of Mr. Willoughby was not slow to understand her meaning, nor to assist her in revealing it so unequivocally as to establish a confidence and a connexion between them, that laid her pride at his feet; but which gave her an unlimited credit on his gratitude.

She could now *unblushingly* talk of her “unfortunate passion.” Could call herself “a self-devoted and unrepenting victim of his former attention towards her.” Could describe the “agony—the madness—which the first conviction of his intended marriage with another had thrown her into”—the “schemes of revenge” that it inspired — “revenge that had terminated so fatally for herself.” She could say “that a moment of delirium, a moment of insanity, had made her the wife of a man whom she despised, whom she detested;” and “that by so doing she had lowered herself in her own eyes, and she knew that she must be lowered almost below contempt in the eyes of him whose approbation, if she could obtain it, would still make one white spot in the darkness which she had drawn around her.”

Where was the heart of man that could receive a sacrifice thus offered ? or who could neglect to purify it of all its bitterness to the fair sacrificer ?

Mr. Willoughby exhausted himself in regret for his own blindness ; at once of the real character of the woman whom he had so ardently admired, and of his own happiness, in the flattering partiality with which she had regarded him, and he poured forth the most vehement professions of admiration, respect, and love, for the creature of whom he had so doltishly deprived himself.

The sacred name of friend was prostituted by each to designate the immoral tie that was between them ; and while she implored him, with the *simplicity* of unassisting helplessness, to protect her from *herself* ; and while he promised to be at once the guardian of her honour and his own, he drank

deeply of the cup of lawless gratification, and began to familiarize himself with all its worst consequences.

At this moment of danger and self-abandonment, the whole charm dissolved as by the stroke of a lance from some omnipotent knight. Lady Charlotte suddenly broke up her establishment at Brighton, and gave the victim of her arts a moment in which to reflect.

It was then that Mr. Willoughby saw the precipice on which he had stood. Astonished, angry, mortified, yet pleased, and grateful for his escape; all his better feelings returned with added force; and carried him impetuously to the feet of Isabella, there to expiate, by unremitted kindness and undeviating rectitude—so he purposed! the wrongs that he had offered to the claims that she had upon him.

But his connexion with Lady Char-

lotte, although it made the greater part of his guilt, was but a small part of his embarrassments. He had played deeply, and lost heavily. The remittances which he had so continually pressed Roberts to make, had been expended in discharging his debts of honour; those of conscience remained uncanceled; and when Lady Charlotte's sudden disappearance allowed him leisure to contemplate the situation in which he stood, he saw, that if he were to conceal the truth from Isabella, even for a few months, the sale of Beechwood must be immediately concluded.

He had returned to town; he put every means into operation; and he had been fortunate enough to accomplish his purpose.

It was in the moment of transport which his success had occasioned, that he had written to Isabella. A month had elapsed since Lady Char-

lotte, in disappointing his hopes, had fulfilled his wishes ; he had had time to return to his senses, and to feel where his true happiness lay. In the angry mood in which he then was with Lady Charlotte, a comparison between the coquette who had seduced him, and the wife whom he had neglected, forced itself on his understanding, and Isabella stood before him in a powerfulness of attraction which she had never before presented to his imagination. He felt at that moment that to live with her, and for his boy, would be equally his happiness and his duty ; and he believed that from henceforth he should wish for no other life ; but he knew not what a scorpion he had admitted into his bosom ; he knew not that he had so often been told by Lady Charlotte, and had so often repeated after her, “ that all her errors and all her sorrows proceeded from a warmth

and ardency of feeling as charming as it was unfortunate and uncommon ;” “that she might be miserable, but could never be guilty ;” “that he was the cause, the innocent cause indeed, but still the cause, of all her wretchedness, and that he owed her every compensation in his power consistent with her duties as a wife, and those that he had imposed upon himself by his character of a husband.” He knew not that all this tissue of nonsense had been repeated, till he had no more doubt of its truth than he had of his own existence ; nor of the consequence which Lady Charlotte had so artfully drawn from it, “that she had an established right to his respect and esteem, and a claim upon his affections, which ought not, and could not be shaken by the formal maxims of the world, any more than they could interfere with the observances that he

owed to Isabella. He knew not that he had adopted the pernicious maxim “that the only real union was the union of souls; and that, while it was kept pure and unalloyed by the grosser indulgence of the senses, it was as innocent as it was lovely.” He knew not that he had received the injurious impressions, “that Isabella’s affections were of a lower order than Lady Charlotte’s; and that while one must remain miserable by being withheld from dedicating herself soul and body to the man whom she loved, the other would be made happy by the even tenor of uninterrupted indulgence and complacent good-will.” Such was the effect that Lady Charlotte’s machinations had really had upon the mind of Mr. Willoughby; but of their force he had ceased to be aware at the moment when her sudden withdrawal of herself from all intercourse with him, had

deeply wounded his vanity; and had left him doubtful whether to impute her disappearance to refined coquetry, or heroic self-command. At this moment he could not entirely expel a lurking suspicion that he had been duped; and the virtues and subduing qualities to which she had laid so strong a claim, and for which, so short a period before, he had been inclined to give her full credit, now seemed something apocryphal; and this shadow of the truth clouded all the charms and all the pretensions of Lady Charlotte. His heart turned to the pure and unsophisticated character of Isabella; and every moment appeared an age that retarded the new era of his existence, which he purposed should from this hour begin; nor did his bridal morning arise so bright to his hopes, nor so welcome to his heart, as did the one on which he quitted London to begin his journey to Eagle's Crag.

CHAP. XXX.

“ She of gentler nature, softer, dearer ;
Strength in her gentleness, hope in her sorrows ;
Whose darkest hour some ray of lightness borrows
From better days to come ; whose meek devotion
Calms every wayward passion’s wild commotion,
’Till Evil’s self seems its strong hold betraying.”

BAILLIE.

ISABELLA had returned from Fellbeck, in the trembling expectation that Mr. Willoughby might be already arrived ; yet she was too reasonable to feel disappointed when she found her home as solitary as when she left it.

I am a fool, thought she, to let my wishes rather than my understanding calculate for me. Three days only of the limited five are yet gone ; but he says, *within* five days. Well then, after to-day I *may* begin to look for him every hour ; but to-day I will try not to expect him. I will try to compose my spirits. Mr. Parr said that he did not think that I could have been so transported. I did not myself know that I could. But this is joy ; and I surely never felt joy before. How tumultuous, and yet how pleasant is the sensation !—but I *will* still it, I *will* be composed.

Isabella, in conformity with this wise resolution, betook herself to some of her wonted occupations ; but in vain did she attempt to read ; in vain did she sit down to her harp ; in vain did she attempt to complete the unfinished sketch that lay on her drawing-

table. The “domestic deity” was not at home. She could do nothing but caress her boy, or wander from room to room to ascertain what she already knew — that every thing was in that exactness of order which was due to the reception of the master of the mansion.

At length this day of vainly premeditated composure closed! and it was succeeded by that wherein all the flutter of joy and expectation would be allowable; but scarcely were the first hours past before the lightness of spirit in which Isabella had risen began to give place to an invading fear that her hopes might be disappointed. There was a magnitude in the bliss that had been promised her, which seemed too vast for reality. She had flattered herself too easily! Some new impediment would arise! It was not possible that she could be so happy!

Mr. Willoughby's letter was read again and again : the more it exceeded all that she had ever hoped to attain, the more it seemed impossible that it should be verified. Yet she started at every sound ; or fancied sounds when they were not to be heard. The day, however, wore away, and none were really heard that announced the arrival of Mr. Willoughby.

“Yet he may still come : he would not regard travelling late. He could not mean to deceive me. No ! he may neglect, but he will never wantonly trifle with my feelings, merely to excite them.”

“But he says I have a steady soul. That I cannot guess at the tumults of his. Perhaps he thinks I cannot feel.”

And Isabella began to think that this opinion might be just, when, after a night of broken sleep and feverish irritation, she found herself in a state

of depression which almost amounted to apathy.

She made as many efforts to excite her feelings, as two days before she had made to still them.

What can be the meaning of my insensibility? thought she. Is it the effect of despair. But how unjust I am to despair? Ten thousand accidents may have occasioned the delay of a few hours. If Mr. Willoughby were to know all that has passed in my heart for the last few days, well might he think me a child! well might he despise me!

It was a seasonable diversion of her thought to receive a note from Catherine. It contained only a few words of kind inquiry, as an accompaniment of a book which she had promised to lend her, but had no allusion to the expected arrival of Mr. Willoughby. Isabella, in return, confined her infor-

mation on this subject to the simple statement that he was not yet come. But she could not make it without such a revulsion of feeling as produced a flood of tears ; and these tears relieved the oppression of her heart. They drove away despair, and re-established the empire of hope.

Calm and confiding, Isabella passed that day and the next : the third she was equally calm, but she had lost all confidence.

Yet I am but where I was a week ago, thought she. I must return to my accustomed employments. I will go to-morrow to Fell-beck. I will again throw myself upon the support of Mr. Parr, and the sympathy of Catherine. How grateful ought I to be for such friends !

Isabella had just drank her coffee, and was sitting in all the sadness of these determinations, when a move-

ment in the house called her attention, and the following moment she was startled by seeing Mr. Roberts enter with a letter in his hand.

“What is the matter, Roberts?” said Isabella; “where is George?”

“My master is just at hand madam,” returned Roberts. “I thought that you might have orders to give; for he does not come alone.”

“What worse have you to tell me?” said Isabella; “is Mr. Willoughby well?”

“Quite so, I believe, madam,” said Mr. Roberts, giving the letter to Isabella. She eagerly broke the seal, and read these words:

“My dearest love! I trust you will do me the justice to believe that it is not my fault that I have not more faithfully kept my engagement; nor that now, when I shall be with you in an hour, that I shall bring a tribe of

people with me, whom you may not, just at present, be glad to see. For my sins (I suppose) I fell in with a party of our friends, who have been lake-seeing; and they would first drag me out of my way, and then *would* accompany me to Eagle's Crag. Dunstan, Lady Charlotte, and Sir Charles Seymour, are the only part of these impertinents who will break in upon you at this unseasonable hour. After having been living with them for so many weeks at Brighton, I could not but consent to their vehemently-expressed desire that I would do them the honours of Eagle's Crag for a few days. I hope they will not stay longer; and then all the evil will be the *mal apropos* moment of their arrival; when I so much wished to have had you and my boy to myself. For the rest, you will not, I dare say, be sorry, after your long retirement, to see

such intimate acquaintances and kind friends. Your favourite, that madcap Burghley, will be with us to-morrow; I would not suffer him to come to-night; but he will be a pleasant reinforcement to our party, when the bustle of the first meeting is over.

Ever yours, F. W."

Quick as the lightning's flash, the perusal of this letter shewed Isabella the strange and perilous situation in which she was placed. All that was dear to her was at stake: her husband's affections! her own dignity! How should she preserve the one, without hazarding the other? To receive Lady Charlotte as a friend would sully her sincerity: not to receive her as a welcome guest would offend Mr. Willoughby, and betray a jealousy, which, however well founded, as she could not doubt it to be, was a reproach to her husband, and a lessening of herself.

How should she, also, be able to still the angry feelings which she felt arise in her bosom against this husband? who appeared to cajole her with more than accustomed tenderness, only to make her a party to his more creditable intercourse with the woman who wronged her.

All these thoughts passed in less than an instant of time through Isabella's mind: but, strong in "the noble propriety of a pure heart, and a disciplined understanding," she took her part without hesitation.

"Let every thing be done that the time will admit, to make your master's reception such as it used to be, when he brought guests to Eagle's Crag," said Isabella. "Mr. Willoughby has some friends with him; you can give orders for the proper lights, and every other particular, that will make the house look as he has formerly seen it,

when it was regularly inhabited ; but I would not have any thing appear like preparation ; still less like magnificence ; the household does not admit of that ; but let all be light and cheerful ; and pray send Evans to me. Mr. Willoughby says he will be here in an hour." Oh, thought Isabella, how different from the meeting that I had anticipated !

But this was no time to give way to tenderness, or repining ; all the powers of her understanding, and all the exaltation of a highly moral sense, were scarcely sufficient to uphold her in the height of conduct, on which she knew she could alone look back with satisfaction, or even self-acquital.

She communicated her wishes to Evans in the same tone which she had held to Roberts ; and found herself so well understood, that she could not

doubt but that the execution would be exact.

Having thus provided that every thing external should do both herself and her husband honour, she turned all her attention to the regulation of her thoughts and her feelings. Whatever had been the first impulse of wounded pride and affection, a little reflection had made her renounce the notion that there could be premeditated unkindness, or vicious duplicity, even in a conduct which appeared so regardless of what was due to her, and so inconsistent with what she had been taught to expect. It was sufficiently painful to resolve her previous disappointment, and her present embarrassment, into that careless indifference which so frequently marked the actions of Mr. Willoughby, into his want of love for her, rather than his passion for another. She felt

that we are as frequently duped by mistrust as by confidence ; and she determined that, if she were to be deceived, it should be with as little loss of her own ingenuity as possible. If she were mistaken in trusting, at this suspicious moment, to the kind affections of her husband, she was resolved not to be accessary to her own degradation, by betraying any suspicion that she was degraded. To control the workings of pride and resentment was not without its difficulty ; but her hardest task was to restrain the expression of her tenderness. To meet the man who had for so many weeks made her nightly dream, and daily wish, with the cool salutation due to an occasional separation of a few hours, was what seemed to her almost an impossibility ; but to betray, before such observers as Lady Charlotte and Sir Charles Seymour, the signs of a passion which they must

know but too well was not reciprocal, was a rock on which, if she should strike, she could almost have wished might sink her.

What she should do, what she should say, how she should look, she settled over and over; feeling at the same time that when the moment arrived, she should neither do, nor say, nor look, any one thing that she had determined best to do, say, or look.

The violent beating of the heart, with which she was seized on hearing the ringing of the bell of the outer court, persuaded her still more of the contemptible figure that she was going to make; and she was ready to have taken refuge in flight had not the conviction that if she abandoned herself at that moment, she was undone for ever, wound up her spirits to the pitch of undergoing the dreadful exigency, let it produce what it would.

An exclamation of surprise and admiration, uttered by Lady Charlotte from the hall, gave her some degree of courage ; and the impatient inquiry of Mr. Willoughby where he should find her, restored all her presence of mind.

“ I am here, my dear Mr. Willoughby ! I am here,” said she, advancing to meet them, “ and most heartily rejoiced to see you.”

“ That is, I think, more than any of us deserve,” said he, kindly saluting her. “ I have used you most abominably ; but I know you will forgive me.”

“ Yes, my dear Isabella,” said Lady Charlotte, “ you must forgive us all ; for we have come upon you in a strange way, and at such an undue hour too ! but it is all the fault of that husband of yours. I thought it a shame to take you so unawares ; and such a multitude as we are ! I would not have come till to-morrow.”

“Then I am more obliged to Mr. Willoughby than to you,” said Isabella, good-humouredly; “and since you have traversed our rugged roads safely, I cannot but rejoice that there were not more hours of expectation added to those I have been in for so many days!”

“At least,” said Mr. Willoughby, casting no very kind eye on Lady Charlotte; the disappointment of that expectation was *not my* fault.”

“No, indeed was it not!” said Lady Charlotte. “My dear Mrs. Willoughby, I do not know what this lord and master of yours meant by all the pains that he took to shut his doors against us; but if we had believed him, we might have fancied that these old walls would have fallen on our heads, or that we should have caught our death from the bad air that we must have breathed within them. But Sir Charles

had reconnoitred the outside of the fortress some weeks ago, and he assured us of its solidity ; and I was resolved to penetrate into the recesses of its extremest interior, that, if I had found you at the bottom of some damp dungeon, I might have run away with you into light and air, and left your graceless husband in your place.”

It could not surprise Isabella that the effrontery which had carried Lady Charlotte through her almost forcible entry into Eagle’s Crag, should shew itself in this continued assumption of protecting familiarity which had so long been offensive to her ; but, as she was resolved for the future to put an entire end to it, she made no return whatever to this sally of Lady Charlotte’s ; only civilly inquiring whether she would not wish for some refreshment, in preference to waiting for sup-

per, which she said she had ordered, as supposing that as travellers they might be hungry.

“ You do not then always go supperless to bed ? ” said Sir Charles, in allusion to her former refusal of partaking of the supper which he had provided for her when they had met on the road ; a refusal which he had by no means forgotten or forgiven.

“ At least,” returned Isabella, “ I do not desire my friends to do so ; and the hospitality of Westmorland knows nothing of striking off one meal out of four.”

“ Isabella,” said Mr. Willoughby, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, “ where can I find my boy ? ”

“ I will take you to him,” said Isabella.

“ And pray let somebody take me to my room,” said Lady Charlotte ; “ I

must get rid of this odious bonnet ; it has made my head ache all day."

Isabella offered to be Lady Charlotte's conductor, and said that she would return and accompany Mr. Willoughby.

"Only tell me where I can find the child," said he, "and you may come to me there."

"You will find him," said Isabella, "in the room which you inhabited for so many of the first years of your life."

"And do you occupy the adjoining apartment?" asked Mr. Willoughby.

Isabella replied in the affirmative ; and Mr. Willoughby left the room without making any reply. Isabella also stood silent for an instant, before she could sufficiently recollect herself to renew her offer of accompanying Lady Charlotte. She had seen but too plainly, in the very short time that had passed, that Mr. Willoughby was

no longer the happy man that he had declared himself in his letters to be ; and there was something so incomprehensible in the circumstances in which she seemed to stand with him, as filled her with sadness and dread. Lady Charlotte did not seem to feel either. Linking her arm into Isabella's, " My dear coz," said she, " I really had no notion that you were the lady of so magnificent a castle. Everything I see absolutely fills me with astonishment and delight. But have you not found it insupportably *triste* to be here so long alone ? What could induce Mr. Willoughby to allow you to be so ? "

" A compliance with my wishes," said Isabella, with a steady voice ; and withdrawing at the same time her arm from Lady Charlotte's, she opened a door.

" I hope," said she, " you will find

everything you wish for. Your maid, I see, is here. You will excuse me if I now go to Mr. Willoughby.”

And the effort here was at an end. Isabella turned quickly into the next chamber, and, throwing herself into a chair, burst into a flood of tears.

Why she wept she could hardly have been able to have told ; but she thought if it had not been for this relief her heart must have burst. The indulgence could not be long ; but, as she passed from the room she was in, she caught a glimpse of herself in a looking-glass, and found such marks of her recent emotion as made it impossible that she should immediately rejoin Mr. Willoughby ; and when she sought him in the nursery he was gone. Isabella could again have cried ; and, lest the sight of her baby should make it impossible to restrain her tears, she did not trust herself with a

single glance, but ran down stairs as if she had fled from some pursuing danger. Taking breath a moment before she entered the library, she felt a fresh mortification when she found therein only Sir Charles and Mr. Dunstan.

She had till this moment scarcely been aware of the presence of the latter; but she now found a relief in appearing to listen to his laboured panegyric upon all that was around him, from the conversation of Sir Charles, with whom, since their last interview, she had resolved to have as little communication as possible. Mr. Dunstan had not yet done protesting that not his friend the Duke of ——'s seat in this county, nor the princely habitation of the Earl of ——, where he had passed so many happy days in the other, were to be compared to Eagle's Crag, when Mr. Willoughby and Lady

Charlotte returned at the same moment, which, although they entered at several doors, gave such an air of correspondence between them as made Isabella blush; and she blushed the deeper on perceiving the eye of Sir Charles fixed on her, with a look, as she thought, expressive at once of anger at the offending parties, and compassion for her. But a moment afterwards she hated herself, and felt indignant with Sir Charles, for a suspicion which she abandoned as wholly unfounded.

Mr. Willoughby approaching her, drew her gently aside; and said with a voice of great emotion, “our dear boy is an angel! I long to fold you in my arms, and thank you for your care of him. I *could not* wait for you; I never enter this place but with emotions that quite unman me. I should either have been a more worthy suc-

cessor of its last revered inmates, or less sensible of the follies which have made me unfit to succeed them ; you, dearest Isabella, must be my redeeming angel ! how I wish that we could have met without so many eyes upon us. Roberts has been talking to me of you ; *you* at least may tread these floors proudly ; I wish you may be able to teach me to tread them happily.”

Isabella tenderly pressed the hand which still held hers, “doubt it not !” was all she said, or could say ; another word, and she must have betrayed the agitation of her heart and spirits. A summons to supper compelled her to turn from Mr. Willoughby, and to accompany her guests to an adjoining apartment.

Isabella saw with a glance of her eye, how well her intentions had been understood both by Roberts and

Evans. All was light, order, and comfort ; but nothing that indicated that the sudden arrival of so many unexpected guests had occasioned either hurry, or had brought forth any appearance beyond that of the ordinary mode of living ; she could scarcely, however, repress a smile when she saw an unliveried attendant at the side-board, who made no part of her household, but whom she immediately recognized as a nephew of Mr. Roberts, who in the life-time of Mr. Willoughby's father had filled the station, which it seemed, from the propriety and habitual ease with which he now performed the office, he could never have quitted.

But Isabella had little leisure for such observations as these ;—there was a something in the scene before her that interested every feeling of her heart. Instead of the careless hilarity

of new assembled friends, the party around her seemed each to be engaged in some cogitation of their own, and as although they forgot that any other but themselves were present.

Lady Charlotte's eye was roving from object to object, with a scrutinizing expression, as if to discover something that it was designed should not appear. Sir Charles, with a contracted brow, devoured in silence the viands that he scarcely seemed to know that he was eating. Mr. Willoughby was evidently struggling with an emotion that made him incapable of attending to any thing else. Mr. Dunstan alone seemed to be alive to what was before him ; but, having declared " that he never was so hungry in his life," it was only what the table or the sideboard could furnish that appeared to have any attraction for him.

Isabella construed all this in a sense

the most gratifying to her wishes. In the evident chagrin of Lady Charlotte she read disappointment; in the abstraction of Sir Charles she thought she detected a fear of the frustration of some nefarious design; and in the acute feeling betrayed by Mr. Willoughby, a feeling which she had scarcely dared to hope made any part of his character, she beheld the means by which he might be recalled to the paths of virtue and of happiness. At this moment she could not but be sensible of the superiority that she derived from the integrity of her heart, and the rectitude of her purposes. She could look backward without self-reproach; and forward with a prayer that all her designs might prosper! She, who but a few hours before had feared that she might be humbled to the dust by the unrighteous triumph of her oppressors, was now the only

one who could carry herself erect in their presence, and hers the only eye that could look steadily in the face of those who surrounded her!

Eager to break up the gloom and strangeness of the scene, she seized the instant of Mr. Dunstan's animated panygyric on the superexcellence of the wine which he was so plentifully drinking, to throw herself at once into conversation with a vivacity which compelled everyone to follow her lead. It could not have been believed that she had been the Recluse of Eagle's Crag for four months, or that her spirits had been depressed by mortification, or her heart wounded by neglect. So powerful was the impulse, that her desire to rise above her guests in the estimation of her husband, gave to the natural resources of her intellect : an impulse which gained strength every moment by the effect which she saw was pro-

duced both on Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby; the one looked on her with a delighted surprise, and the other said, with a tone of raillery which ill disguised the envy she felt,

“Pray, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, what Westmorland Helicon have you drank, that has converted your London taciturnity into such flowing eloquence?”

“The Helicon of health and happiness,” said Isabella, with a timid glance cast towards Mr. Willoughby. And such was her anticipation of the new era of her life, which she believed to be opening upon her, that Isabella at this moment felt a lightness of heart and spirit which but the hour before she would have denied would ever have been her lot.

“I say the Helicon of innocence and good humour,” said Mrs. Willoughby.

“Of talent and hospitality,” said Sir Charles.

“Of self-possession and triumph,” said Lady Charlotte.

Mr. Dunstan said nothing; for Isabella not having partaken of his only conceivable source of inspiration, he knew not to what to impute the hilarity on which her friends complimented her, and he was therefore content to acquiesce in the fact, without attempting to assign a cause.

“Softly, softly, my good friends,” said Isabella; “lest I suspect that you think me so completely rusticated, as even to have forgotten the cajoleries of society.”

“But is it really literally the case,” said Lady Charlotte, “that you have moved the sole and silent inhabitant of this stately mansion? have you never conversed with a single human being?”

“Not literally,” replied Isabella ; “but, with one exception, I believe I might say yes, in your sense of the words.”

“And that exception,” said Mr. Willoughby, “is Mr. Parr.”

“Parr !” said Sir Charles, starting ; “what Parr ?”

“The country people,” said Isabella, laughing, “call him Queen Catharine’s cousin ; and *if* superior excellence is a regal stamp, he may well maintain the relationship.”

“I hope this paragon of yours is at least fourscore years old !” said Mr. Willoughby.

“Not quite,” replied Isabella ; “but as he was the friend of this house nearly half that time ago, I hope you will not be very jealous.”

“I have certainly a remembrance of the person of whom you speak,” said Mr. Willoughby. “My father,”

added he, with a sigh, “ had a friend of that name, whom he used to tell me that he wished me to resemble more than any other person whom he knew. I shall be glad to renew my acquaintance with my prototype.”

“ That wish,” said Lady Charlotte, with a kind of malicious gaiety, “ like most other parental prayers, has been scattered by the winds, if Mrs. Willoughby reads aright the character of this miraculous Mr. Parr.”

“ Not for any want of excellence,” said Isabella, with quickness, “ although the merit may be of a different kind.”

Mr. Willoughby coloured with pleasure and gratitude ; and perhaps from a little self-reproach, and the warmth with which Isabella spoke.

“ Thank you, thank you, Isabella, said he, kindly. “ I would rather that you should give my character than that Lady Charlotte should.”

“ Who doubts it ?” said Lady Charlotte. “ Which of us ever desired to sit to a *faithful* portrait taker ?”

“ Caricatures are not faithful portraits,” said Isabella. “ With a few strokes I can give you something that shall resemble a man, but that is not the true representation of the human figure. See,” said she, exemplifying what she said by a few scratches with a pencil on the back of a letter, “ *this* is satire ;—look there,” pointing to an excellently painted portrait, “ *that* is truth.”

“ The whole human race should make its bow to you, my dear Mrs. Willoughby,” said Sir Charles.

“ But positively,” said Lady Charlotte, “ whether he is a Methusalem, or a Joseph, I should like to see this wonderful personage. We could then better know how to estimate the penance that our dear Mrs. Willoughby

has undergone since she has been dismissed from the world of human creatures, with a *go in peace*, and shut up between four stone walls. Will not the monster come out of his den at your bidding?"

"No!" said Isabella, "nor at the *bidding* of any other person."

"Oh! pray let him stay and growl there," said Sir Charles. "This can be no Parr that I ever knew," added he, as if rebutting an imputation.

"This is rather rough badinage," said Mr. Willoughby, "considering that you are speaking of Mrs. Willoughby's friend, and of the man who has been the hereditary friend of this house; and is not likely to induce Isabella to try to bring Mr. Parr amongst us."

"We shall probably have no loss," said Lady Charlotte, who now began evidently to be out of temper; "his

talents of charming are most likely confined to a *tête-à-tête*."

"I have never seen Mr. Parr *tête-à-tête*," said Isabella, with dignity.

"Oh!" said Lady Charlotte, with a tone of triumphant discovery, "how the clouds break up! the solitude of Eagle's Crag is the solitude of *select society*."

"The society of Mr. Parr and his daughter," said Isabella.

"His daughter!" cried Sir Charles eagerly, "is she young? is she handsome? is she beautiful?"

"I have succeeded so ill in the pægyric of one of my friends," replied Isabella, "that I shall be careful how I to speak for the other."

"I am abominably tired!" said Lady Charlotte, affecting to stifle a yawn which was not there.

"You would like to retire?" said Isabella.

“ Indeed I shall be glad, I have a horrible head ache.”

The bell was rung, the lights were distributed, and this ill-assorted assembly broke up.

The first thing that Isabella did in the morning, was to write the following letter to Mr. Parr :

“ Rejoice with me, my dear friends! Mr. Willoughby arrived last night; he had been delayed by unexpectedly falling in with some of his acquaintance, who have been amusing themselves with visiting the northern lakes and mountains : they have not thought Eagle’s Crag unworthy of their notice. I suppose they will stay with us a few days. Mr. Willoughby is so happy as to have a very just remembrance of you, my dear sir ; he desires me to say that nothing could give him more pleasure than that you and dear Catherine would favour us with your company.

Your usual apartments are at your disposal. Mr. Willoughby would in person have preferred this request, but that he is particularly engaged this morning, and he is not willing to lose a day of your company, if you will be so kind as to give it us.

“ You cannot doubt, my dear sir, how happy I should be to introduce to Mr. Willoughby, the only source of pleasure that I have possessed in his absence, but I think it fair to tell you whom you will meet.

“ Mr. Dunstan and Lady Charlotte, and Sir Charles Seymour, are already with us ; and I understand that two or three more gentlemen are to join our party to-day ; the one whom I best know is Mr. Burghley, Lord Burghley’s nephew, and a playfellow of mine in former days ; and who will be the playfellow of somebody all his life-time ; for he is almost as much a

school-boy as when he used to come from Westminster to dine with us on a Sunday. You would like him ; he has no evil in him, and a great deal of good, is very acute, and very good-humoured.

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ ISABELLA WILLOUGHBY.”

Mr. Parr returned the following answer :

“ My dear Madam,

“ Catherine and I do most sincerely congratulate you on the arrival of Mr. Willoughby.

“ I should not have deferred an hour waiting upon him, accompanied by my daughter, if I had not imperative reasons not to come to Eagle's Crag at present. I am sure, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, you will give me credit for the weight and truth of these reasons, although I feel myself obliged not to explain them. Be so

kind as to use your influence with Mr. Willoughby, that he may extend to me the same degree of confidence.

“Accept, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, of the united prayers of myself and Catherine, for every blessing for yourself and Mr. Willoughby, which I know that your virtues so well deserve, and which must naturally wait on those that I cannot but believe must be hereditary in Mr. Willoughby.

“I am, my dear madam, with the truest esteem and respect, most sincerely yours,
EDWARD PARR.”

This letter confirmed a suspicion which had found its way into Isabella's mind. When Mr. Willoughby read it a thought crossed his mind also, which moved his spleen and clouded his brow.

“After all,” said he, “Isabella, I suspect that this favourite of yours, is at best but a misanthrope, who thinks

he is virtuous when he condemns those failings in others, to which he has out-lived the temptation in himself."

"Let my influence at least *so* far prevail," said Isabella, mildly, "as to induce you to *suspend* your judgment. If you cannot give Mr. Parr credit for the virtues which he really does possess, do not charge him with vices that you have no evidence to establish."

"Why? what but misanthropy, or *worse*, can make him refuse to visit me, when he has, as it were, been *living* with you?" said Mr. Willoughby.

"He does not refuse to visit *you*," said Isabella; "and as for his reasons, I will engage for him, that they are such as would do him honour."

"And you know those reasons? at least can so nearly guess them, that it is next to knowledge?" said Mr. Willoughby.

"No, on my word!" said Isabella.

And you are *sure*, that he has never insinuated into your mind any suspicion of ——.” He stopped, feeling that he was touching too tender a string.

“Of no human creature upon earth!” said Isabella, firmly and eagerly. “My dear Mr. Willoughby I do not know to what you allude. I will not even think of what you might intend to say; but believe me, that Mr. Parr is as incapable of attempting to poison my mind with injurious suspicions of any one, as I should be of entertaining them upon any evidence short of proof.”

“My dearest Isabella, I do believe it,” said Mr. Willoughby; “and I ought to be ashamed of having doubted your candour for a moment. But when the breast is troubled, it does not reflect objects truly!” added he, with a sigh, and turning from her.

The nature of Mr. Willoughby's suspicion could not escape the penetration of Isabella, and it made her doubt the truth of her own ; but, be the cause what it would, the fact was the same. There was something in the party at Eagle's Crag, as it was at present constituted, from which Mr. Parr was resolved to keep aloof both himself and his daughter ; and this conviction gave Isabella ground for many uneasy reflections.

CHAP. XXXI.

“ Women !

Their faces are th' entrenched beauties of
The world in one, which Nature made in scoff
Of all else excellencies !—but therein
Shelter'd more treason than the world had sin :
For well she knew those ills that would betide them,
Would shew them too foul, without a veil to hide
them :

So that men might be lur'd, and not descry,
In angel's shape, she clad black misery.”

FELTHAM.

THIS party, wholly unconscious, as it should seem, that they were fit objects either of censure or suspicion, met at breakfast in all the sunshine of hilarity and good humour.

Lady Charlotte had no occasion for a headache, as the veil of ill-temper; the shade that had obscured the brow of Mr. Willoughby on the perusal of Mr. Parr's letter had disappeared; and Isabella thought that she had never seen Sir Charles Seymour half so amiable; and Mr. Dunstan talked on, not discouraged, although unheeded, of "the astonishing fashionable lounge that his house was at Brighton;" and of the number of fine people, and fine places, that he and Lady Charlotte had visited since they left it. It seemed to be Lady Charlotte's point to establish that she and Isabella were friends, and that they always had been so. She recounted twenty youthful scrapes and frolics that she asserted they had been engaged in together; and by the particularity of the circumstances that she narrated, and her undaunted appeals to Isabella for the confirmation of all

she said, she could not fail to fix the fullest conviction on the minds of all that heard her, Isabella's alone excepted, that she was uttering nothing but the simplest truth : thus trusting the success of her own effrontery to the modesty of another, who could not endure to put her to the blush by exposing her falsehood.

Isabella was not unacquainted with this part of the factitious and artful character of Lady Charlotte, and she had often suffered from it in the course of their intercourse ; the only matter of surprise, therefore, that this exhibition of it occasioned her, was what could be the present motive for it. She saw, indeed, that Mr. Willoughby listened to all these idle, but well told tales, with a marked pleasure, as although he could wish nothing so much as to persuade himself that there was a conformity of sentiment and feeling

between the two ladies, which he had not before been aware of; but at length observing that all the histories originated with Lady Charlotte, and that they met no farther confirmation from Isabella, than the not denying them amounted to, he said,

“How comes it, Isabella, that Lady Charlotte has so much better a memory than you? the days of your youth are not so far distant, but that you might remember all that happened as well as Lady Charlotte?”

“Oh, and so she does!” replied Lady Charlotte; “but don’t you know that Isabella is become wise ever since those blue stocking evenings, when she astonished all the world? besides, she is matron-like, and sententious; now, I shall never be wise, or matron-like, or sententious, nor any thing else but what my feelings make me.”

“And yet at this moment,” said

Isabella, "you trust rather to my feelings, than your own."

"There! did I not tell you so?" retorted Lady Charlotte, "not only sententious, but oracular! well, I will try if I cannot be wise too; and my first lecture shall be taken this morning, and my dear Mrs. Willoughby shall be my preceptress; I am resolved to have her all to myself. I have a thousand things to say to her, so you gentlemen may dispose of yourselves as you think fit. I am resolved that Isabella shall go out in my little carriage. It will be quite a treat to you, my dear; you have been so long without a carriage, and you will so delight to shew me the lions of this princely domain."

"I will attend you, in whatever way you please," said Isabella; "but I shall make a sacrifice of my inclination by exchanging my beautiful sure-

footed pony for any carriage whatever ; and it must be a very diminutive one indeed, that will not exclude you from the best part of the beauties and peculiarities of our glens, fells, and tearns.

“ Glens ! fells ! and tearns ! ” repeated Lady Charlotte, “ why, my little northern lassie, what kind of language do you mean to speak when you return to the streets and squares of civilized life ? ”

“ Just the language that I speak now,” said Isabella ; “ the language of truth.”

The two ladies prosecuted Lady Charlotte’s plan ; and Isabella found herself in the novel situation, not only of a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Charlotte, but treated by her in a manner as if, through the whole course of their lives, there had subsisted between them the familiarity and affection

which naturally belonged to their acquaintance and relationship. Isabella could not but remember how very much the case had been otherwise ; nor was she inclined suddenly to forget the past, when the least injurious cause to which even her candour could ascribe the change in Lady Charlotte, was a belief, that it arose from a desire to establish herself at Eagle's Crag till the return of the town season.

But Isabella could not but be civil and obliging ; because she was naturally good-tempered, and habitually well bred. She therefore did " seriously incline," to exhibit to Lady Charlotte all the romantic spots, and sequestered beauties ; all the cataracts and mountain steeps of the noted scenes through which they passed ; with a reservation however of Fell-beck, from which she resolved most firmly to keep aloof.

But she soon found that Lady Char-

lotte had little attention for all that she attempted to shew her ; and that it was something more than a form of speech when she had said “ that she was resolved to have her all to herself, for that she had a thousand things to say to her.”

“ All this,” said she, in reply to Isabella’s calling her observation to the objects around them, “ is very magnificent and very sublime—and very terrific ; but I have really seen towering mountains and roaring torrents till I am sick of them. I would prefer the little delicious half acre in Grosvenor-square, with all its trim gravel paths, and its tiny shrubbery, to all the tremendous inequalities by which we are surrounded ; and I can assure you, if I had no other motive for continuing in this neck-breaking country, but a passion for its beauties, I should by this time have been far on my way

to smoothly shaven lawns, and civilized animalcula."

What can this be meant to lead to? thought Isabella. She knew Lady Charlotte's maxim of daring to avow all that she dared to do; but it cannot be, thought she, that she means to brave me to my face, and to make me the confident either of my husband's passion for her, or of her's for him.

Isabella sat in painful silence, resolved, that if the blow must come, it should force its way through all the impediments that she could oppose to it.

She attempted somewhat of a diversion, by calling to the servant to make some inquiry about the road.

"Oh, never mind what road we take," said Lady Charlotte, "provided they don't overturn us, and I can have my *tête-à-tête* out with you. I told you I had a thousand things to say to

you ; and though perhaps I might not be very accurate in my enumeration, my discourse shall make up in weight what it falls short of in numbers.”

“Just now,” returned Isabella, “I think I should prefer tale to weight : remember how long I have been out of the way of hearing any thing but the sound of the water-fall, or the spirit of the mountain ; and rather give me what will amuse me, than any thing that will call for wisdom to comment upon.”

“Bless me, my dear,” replied Lady Charlotte, “I should almost suspect that you anticipate what I have to say ; you seem so much afraid to hear it.”

“Then why say it at all?” said Isabella.

“Because, my dear, I love you : because I am interested for you : and because, although the evil may be great, it may not, if taken in time, be

irretrievable ! and I know nobody so proper as myself to put you on your guard, and point out what is best to be done."

Isabella was tempted to jump out of the carriage ; but Lady Charlotte, as if fearing that she might meditate such an escape from the insidious communication which she purposed, laid her hand forcibly on her arm, exclaiming, " Oh Isabella, how little do we know what we ought to wish for ! — how little do we know what is good for us ! — who would have believed that a marriage such as yours, the mortification of all who envied you, and the triumph of all who loved you, should in one short twelve-months, be fraught with ruin to yourself and offspring ! "

Isabella could not now move, or speak ; but she turned her eyes on Lady Charlotte with such a look of

deprecation, as must have moved any one less stony-hearted than her present tormentor, to have recoiled from her purpose.

“ I cannot believe,” continued Lady Charlotte, “ that you can be wholly ignorant as to what I allude ; but having buried yourself alive so long, and Willoughby not being one of those husbands who think it their duty to make a confession of their sins to their wives, you cannot be aware to what extent the evil has proceeded ; nor how necessary it is that you should interfere to put a stop to it.”

“ Lady Charlotte,” said Isabella, with an unmoved countenance, and with a steady voice, the sound of which even surprised herself, “ I *hear* no accusations against my husband, of what nature soever they may be. I will rely upon the integrity and affection of Mr. Willoughby against the

suspicious or insinuations of any person breathing.”

“ My dear child,” said Lady Charlotte, “ this is no time to play Madam La Governante’s sentiments upon me. Lay aside these heroics; they have misled you far enough already, and let us talk common sense; you and I know the world pretty well. Would you not laugh at your good cousin if she were to tell you with a grave face that she relied on the integrity and affections of Lord Western? and why should you and I be exempted from the common lot? Heaven preserve me from the folly of maintaining the impeccability of my august spouse. Although I must do him the justice to say that his sins are not of the same nature as those that beset your spotless sovereign. The plain truth is, that Willoughby has fallen into the most ruinous of all absurdities, as I have but too many family reasons to call it.

How fallen I do not know; for I do believe that with him, it was not an original sin; and this gives me more hope of cure, which good counsel and good friends may effect, of both which you may avail yourself, if like a forward child, you do not dash the cup of health from your mouth. I saw a little of this several months ago, and would have warned you then, but — pardon me, my dear Isabella,—like the rest of us perhaps, matrimony had put you upon your stilts, and it was no time for me to act upon our former familiarity; and there might be something of the same intoxication on my part—I am sure I make no claim to more temperance than my neighbours; but of course we are both pretty well sobered by this time, and the best thing that we can do, is to assist each other in bearing the burthens of life as well as we can, and in finding out

as many indemnifications for its disappointments as our ingenuity can suggest. No body's wine is clear to the bottom. I would have warned you I say ; I did *not*, because, it may be, I was thinking just then more of myself than of you ; but I do assure you that for many weeks I have thought more of you than myself.

“ Perhaps you don't know that Willoughby has been living a great deal with us at Brighton. I know he is an idle correspondent ; there I could not but see how he was going on. I remonstrated ; I scolded ; I called in the aid of Sir Charles Seymour, than whom I can assure you, my dear, you have not a more disinterested friend in the world, and he never plays. You know I have odd fancies, and I have thought if Lady Jane had not been in such a hurry to clap up your marriage with Willoughby, for whom I am per-

suaded that you did not care a pin when you married him, that you might have been the happy wife of Sir Charles Seymour—hush, hush ! my dear ; none of your moral disclaimings—none of your virtuous indignation, I beg ; let my fancies pass ; they are *but* fancies. We were talking of the incorrigibility of the man whom you *do* call your husband — whether an *attentive*, a *faithful*, husband you know best ; but he *is* your husband, and the father of your child ; and for both your sakes I would have saved him if I could ; but all in vain : there were too many of our society that tempted him to sin ; and the ruin went on with such gigantic strides, that I really trembled even for the walls of yon stately mansion ; I saw but one thing to do : I broke up our establishment all of a sudden. It is true that nothing could be more agreeable than the life I was living at

Brighton, if it had not been for the folly of Willoughby in more shapes than one: but the thought of the evil that he was bringing upon *you*, poisoned every pleasure. I believe he thought me one of the most capricious of mortals, when I told him one day that he had had his last dinner with us, and when he found that I was really off the next morning. But I did not care what he thought. I knew that Sir Charles would make use of this sudden check to his usual habits to turn his thoughts to what he ought to have been thinking of long before, rejoining you, my dear; and our little plot succeeded. We soon heard that he had sold Beechwood. There, my dear, was one limb of your grandeur lopped off, yet it was a measure of the most imperative necessity, and which averted all immediate causes for apprehension; and we heard next, that

he was actually set off for Eagle's Crag—to fix him there became my point. But I must not arrogate all the merit of what I have done to myself. I will candidly confess that I have acted by the advice both of your mother and my own. I had communicated my uneasiness on your account to my mother; she made it quite a family affair, and consulted with yours what could be done. They have agreed that nothing but a residence in Westmorland for a few years will retrieve matters; and they, dear excellent people as they are! “could not but hope,” “could not but believe,” that “his regard for you and his boy,” his “good sense,” “his reason,” and “his duty,” would make him adopt this plan with the most facile readiness. But, without assuming any very wonderful sagacity to myself, I confess I did a little laugh at their ignorance of human nature.

Perhaps it was only a *façon de parler*, in their character of *Elders*; for both Lady Jane and Lady Stanton *do* know that part of human nature which walks about in the world; and cannot in their hearts have much more value than I have for the simple fare called “good sense,” or “reason,” or the “duty,” of any man without a garnish of pleasure: and I thought that when he returned to you, out of spirits, as must be the case, to a dreary neglected residence—for I had been strangely misled to believe that this place, which I find so stately and magnificent, was almost wholly dilapidated, and unfurnished—he would think of nothing but running away again, and leaving you behind him; and perhaps return to some of his old haunts; where finding them ready swept and garnished, he might take to him seven other spirits more wicked

than himself, so that his last state might be worse than his first.

“ Now, my dear, I could see no means so likely to prevent his retrogression, as to make his present home agreeable to him ; to set him out in it well ; and to give him an experience to refer to of the pleasures it could afford him. Some of this store of wisdom I imparted to my two sage coadjutrices, and they suggested that I could not do better than to throw myself in the way of Willoughby, on his road into Westmorland, and under pretence of wanting to see his place, for which I did not care a farthing but for you, my dear ; or to see you, which was natural enough ; or any other nonsense I could think of ; to fasten ourselves upon him, with a few other agreeable people for a little time, just to break the first gloom of his return, and to make him feel that there

are pleasures in society apart from that odious excitation which depends upon a card. The first step you know is all—and I am charmed to find, from the state of your habitation, and every thing around it, that we shall have an ally in our praise-worthy purpose that I had not reckoned upon. Willoughby is not so free from vanity (I *may* say that, I hope, without offence), but that he must be charmed to exhibit such a princely domain as this is, to some of those who perhaps think him a ruined man; and really, my dear, when I see the dignified order by which you are surrounded, and the unhurried accommodation that awaits your guests, I cannot but suppose that Willoughby has more resources than I was aware of; and that nothing is wanting to the success of our little plan, but that you should lend yourself, with gaiety and good-humour, to the circumstances of

the present hour ; give life and soul to the society that we have collected for you, and enter into communication with your neighbours ; many of whom I know would have visited you long ago, but that they understood that you did not wish to see any body ; at least so they have told me ; but perhaps the truth may be, (for heaven knows we are all selfish creatures !) the not being willing to take long drives merely to see a recluse wife, who could not be supposed to have much to offer them in the way of amusement. But the case will be now quite different, and you have but to let the voice of rumour go forth, that you and Mr. Willoughby shall be glad to see your friends ; and the courts of Eagle's Crag will be no longer solitary.

“ All this, my dear, I have thought it right to state to you fully and candidly, that there might be no mistaking

of motives, or conjectures as to how? and why? and for how long? and such questions. Here I am at your service for as much time as you may wish to have me; and if you will but steadily follow my plan, I will engage for it, that before the winter is over, Willoughby will be quite an altered person, and in the right way to retrieve, perhaps, all that he has lost?"

Lady Charlotte paused: for what more could she say to an auditor who seemed determined not to interrupt her, or to give her occasion, by seeming to doubt its truth, to prove any thing that she had asserted?

After a moment's silence, as if to ascertain whether she had any more to hear, Isabella said:

"Lady Charlotte, I have listened to all that you have thought proper to say to me, and I have no other reply to make, but, that I beg you to be-

lieve, that as you confess yourself to have been misinformed as to the state of Mr. Willoughby's property in this part of the world, that you may very probably be equally in an error in the conclusions that you have drawn as to his circumstances in other particulars." Then, speaking to the servant, "Go home," said she.

It is impossible to describe the concentrated rage that filled the heart of Lady Charlotte at the calm contempt with which Isabella had received all her professions of kindness, her information, her claims to sagacity, her advice, and offers of alliance. It was completely evident that she gave not the smallest credit to any thing that she had heard.

No human being had less command over her passions than had Lady Charlotte; even the powerful spring which but the moment before had actuated her

hypocrisy, was scarcely strong enough to resist the impulse given by rage, to throw off all disguise, and to defy Isabella in open terms. Her eyes sparkled with fury: she clasped her fingers to the palm of her hand, relaxed them, again clasped them with an energy which hurt her, and again unclosed them, before she could regain command enough of herself to speak in terms of common civility, and it was hardly thus that she did speak.

“Isabella, you make me mad! will you be a child and a dupe all your life-time? or do you fancy that you can dupe me? but let me tell you——

“No,” said Isabella, gently interrupting her, “pray let me tell you, — you say that you believe that you have done your duty in giving me the advice and information that you have done; permit me to do what I believe

to be mine, as to the manner in which I receive what you have said."

"Yes, yes!" replied Lady Charlotte, vehemently, "go on in your fancied security and wisdom, till ruin engulphs you, your child, your husband! you will not have to reproach me that I did not warn you. I would have saved you."

"I am warned; I trust I shall be saved," said Isabella; and still her voice was unbroken, and her countenance unchanged: but the effort that she had made to preserve her composure, had nearly overcome her; and she felt that a few minutes longer continuance in her present torture, and she could endure no more. Happily at this critical instant, a sharp turning in the road, brought them of a sudden almost into contact with Sir Charles Seymour, Mr. Dunstan, and Mr. Wil-

loughby, who were pursuing their morning amusement.

“Stop, stop!” cried Lady Charlotte, impatiently, “let me get out, I am tired of the carriage, I will walk”—and, instantly banishing from her countenance every trace of her late rage, “Oh,” cried she, in a kind of good humoured mockery, “Oh, the horrors of a female *tête-à-tête*! I have wearied poor Isabella to death; and, to say the truth, she has not been unrevenged. Here, here, Sir Charles, take my seat, while I trudge homewards with *caro sposo*, and Willoughby.”

“I think,” said Isabella, jumping out of the carriage, “I can equal most of you in walking; so, if you please, we will dismiss the servants, and proceed all together.”

“No, no!” said Sir Charles, “do have some pity on me; I have no dread

of a *tête-à-tête*; and I long to explore that delicious dell that lies to the left; and who will be able to shew me its beauties half so well as you?"

And at the same time he attempted to draw her gently towards the little carriage, and to prevail with her to resume her place in it.

"What a *contre temps*!" cried Mr. Dunstan, pettishly, "here's our whole plan for the morning broken up. I thought, ladies, that you were quite dedicated to yourselves for the whole morning; prithee, Willoughby, lay your commands on Mrs. Willoughby to get into the carriage again; and I shall take the liberty of requesting Lady Charlotte not to suffer her caprice thus to put us all to the route."

"I never do lay my commands on Mrs. Willoughby," returned Mr. Willoughby, looking kindly on Isabella; "it has not been my way; first,

I believe from my hatred to all restraint myself; and now, because I suspect, if either of us were to command, she would be the better ruler of the two."

The thrill of grateful rapture that ran through every vein of Isabella's heart, on hearing these words, was nearly as destructive of the equanimity of her demeanour, as had been the fiendish attacks which Lady Charlotte had made upon her feelings so little time before. Sliding her arm gently beneath Mr. Willoughby's, at once to steady her steps, and to indulge her fondness; she said, as she tenderly pressed the arm she held, "thank you, thank you! but it is a shame thus to interrupt what you were about to do; shall I get into the carriage again, and endeavour to persuade Lady Charlotte to do so too? the penance to her

cannot be long ; we are not half a quarter of a mile from the house ?”

Mr. Willoughby’s answer was interrupted by an angry squabble between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Dunstan.

“ There’s nothing on earth so absurd as you are,” said Mr. Dunstan.

“ Gently, gently, Dunstan !” cried Mr. Willoughby ; “ we will have you tossed in a blanket for a discourteous knight, if you go on at that rate. What can we do less, and what can we do that we shall like better, than to escort the ladies to the house, as they do us the honour to wish it ? We shall have more than sufficient time for all that we meant to do, after we have seen them safe at home ; and then we shall all meet at dinner in good humour with each other.”

“ Pshaw !” said Mr. Dunstan, “ you would spoil the whole sex, Willoughby.”

“ Shall I stroke the black dog off

its back, deary?" said Lady Charlotte, with the most provoking insolence of look and tone; "or shall I say pray, pray! as it used to do to me, when I was sovereign? When there *was* something on earth more absurd than me; and when I was not treated with a pshaw!"

"Let me alone!" said Mr. Dunstan, putting aside Lady Charlotte's hands, which in mockery she was holding up in a petitioning posture.

"And fall these sayings from that gentle tongue?" said she, with a malicious laugh; "but be it as you will; it is all for my good I dare say;" putting her hands awkwardly before her, and making him a curtesy, while he looked as if he could have beaten her.

"Hush!" said Mr. Willoughby, "he is in no humour to be sported with; pray take my other arm; he will

be himself again in a moment, and then you may do what you will."

"I care not what he does," returned she; "you know what a brute he is, and how much I have to bear, and how I bear it."

"No more, no more, I beg," said Mr. Willoughby. "You will quite astonish Isabella."

"Oh, that I could be like her," cried Lady Charlotte; "so calm! so reasonable! so unmoved! so——" it seemed as if Mr. Willoughby at that moment exerted his influence so as to make it effectual; for she suddenly stopped; then said,

"I am ashamed of myself, but——" again she stopped, as although restrained by something more than her own prudence; and she walked on in silence; while Sir Charles having placed himself on the other side of Isabella, eagerly entered into conver-

sation with her, evidently with the purpose of withdrawing her thoughts from the disagreeable scene that had just passed; and all moving on together, they left Mr. Dunstan in the middle of the road, too sulky to stir; but seeming to entertain himself with throwing bits of stone at every bird that flitted by: and then, when they were almost out of hearing, calling after them, "I shall stay for you here! don't be long! make haste! to which he had no other answer returned, but by a laugh of Lady Charlotte's, which she took care should be loud enough to reach his ears.

"Fie, fie!" said Mr. Willoughby.

"I tell you that I must either laugh or cry;" said she; "and I have already given him more tears than he is worth."

No answer being made by Mr. Willoughby, and Sir Charles continuing

with gaiety and good-breeding to engage the attention of all by various topics, the storm was lulled into silence.

Surely, thought Isabella, I need not be afraid of the influence of such a woman !

Yet, alas ! how soon had she to abandon this consoling thought !

CHAP. XXXII.

— “ If it be so,
We need no grave to bury honesty ;
There is not a grain of it the face to sweeten
Of the whole dungy earth.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE two gentlemen having conducted the ladies to the house, Isabella, as they were about to enter, saw her boy in the nurse's arms, and turning to caress him for a moment, she left Mr. Willoughby and Lady Charlotte still arm in arm. As she turned again to join them, she heard

Lady Charlotte say, "*Indeed* I am ashamed—yet *you* well know that there *are* moments when I *can* command my feelings."

"Ah! too well!" returned Mr. Willoughby; and Isabella saw the hand which was still detained within her husband's, gently pressed, and resigned with a sigh.

For an instant Isabella felt as if fixed to the spot on which she stood; but recollecting herself, she turned once more to her child, and taking him out of the nurse's arms, she carried him into the house, without any farther apparent advertence to the rest of the party; nor did it seem that she was more regarded by them than they were by her. At this moment, Mr. Willoughby's consciousness of his own guilty weakness robbed him of all the honest pleasure of a parent, and made him ashamed to lift an eye

to his spotless and injured wife. Sir Charles had stepped aside to give some directions to a servant ; and as to Lady Charlotte, as she could not absolutely stab Isabella to the heart, she had no other relief for the malignant passions which agitated her, than to escape from the presence of the object of her unjust hatred.

But, although unmolested, Isabella was not the less oppressed : her mind was wrought up to such a pitch of agony, that she seemed at length to have lost all self-command. She clasped her infant again and again almost madly to her bosom. She called on Heaven for pity ; and felt that her prayers were granted in a flood of tears, which fell from her eyes, and which seemed to save her from distraction.

In her own room, and alone, Isabella had leisure to revolve in her mind the

various emotions of the last hour ; to analyze and arrange the mass of falsehood and truth which had been uttered by Lady Charlotte ; and to understand, if possible, the motives that had elicited both the one and the other.

Isabella did but too painfully acknowledge the faithfulness of the representation made to her of the pecuniary difficulties which Mr. Willoughby had brought upon himself ; but why should they be forced upon her apprehension by Lady Charlotte, except from the paltry wish of triumphing over her, she could not guess. And had she not other points, beyond comparison more galling, on which to establish her superiority ? Yet she seemed to wish to veil all these by a hollow profession of friendship ; and by representing herself as acting in conjunction with the parents of both. Her insidious re-

commendation of Sir Charles Seymour to her favour startled Isabella; and awoke a suspicion of a concert—a combination of mischief—so black that the pureness of her soul revolted from the very thought.

“And was it possible that Mr. Willoughby could be aware of such a combination?—it was *not* possible; she did not entertain the thought for the smallest possible division of time. Was he then to be a dupe?” The intellect of Isabella was bewildered in such a maze of wickedness, her heart could not understand it; it refused to believe it. “Mr. Willoughby might desert, but he could never betray her. His passions might declare for Lady Charlotte; but every instance of his affection, of his admiration, and even of his reverence, that he had given in the short space that they had lately been together, she believed to be genuine.” Even Lady

Charlotte, although she knew her capable of a pleasure in tormenting her, in triumphing over her, in misrepresenting her, she could not prevail with herself to believe would plot to make her not only miserable, but infamous! she blushed for having suffered the imagination to discolour the whiteness of her mind; she rejected it as a chimaera that her fevered brain had engendered in the moment of frenzied feeling. “And why had she suffered herself to be so put from her path of even rectitude?—of self-government? what had the disclosed intimacy between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby told her more than what she had so long believed? and might not this be the very escape on which Mr. Willoughby had seemed to congratulate himself? should she not be thankful for this? should it not encourage her by every means in her power to

strengthen her influence over her husband? to rejoice in, rather than to complain of the fiery ordeal to which she was exposed? in the progress of which she might hope, by the acute exercise of her understanding, and the mild operation of her virtues; to baffle the arts of the one party, and to awaken all the slumbering excellencies of the other. She was sensible that Lady Charlotte felt her superiority; the involuntary admiration which she expressed; the ill-humour that she had betrayed; convinced her of it. What have I then to do, thought Isabella, but to look well that I am true to myself? to keep suspicion and irritation aloof; to hold an even tenor of demeanour, and to trust in God for the issue.

The wisdom and piety of such resolves soon restored Isabella to a composure of mind which enabled her, not

only to resolve, but to act. Yet the sadness of her heart would at times relieve itself by a deep sigh ; and the agitation of the morning was written in such legible characters on her features, that it was impossible that the effect could escape observation when the party re-assembled before dinner.

Sir Charles's " Good God ! has any thing happened to you since we parted ?" and Mr. Willoughby's affectionate inquiry, " Isabella, my dear, are you not well ?" revealed to Isabella what she had not herself adverted to, in the change of her appearance. The consciousness of the cause soon restored the colour to her cheeks ; and while she replied to Mr. Willoughby with the simplicity of truth, " I have been a little unwell, but I am now better ;"—Lady Charlotte cried out with a coquettish air of her head, " and able, I

hope, to chastise Sir Charles for his ungallant notice of your ill looks."

"What has been so transitory," said Sir Charles, looking with evident pleasure on Isabella's heightened beauty, "ought not indeed to have been the object of observation 'twas here—it's gone!"

"Fine speeches," said Mr. Willoughby, "flow from light feelings; but they will not cure a real evil. My dearest Isabella, if you feel yourself indisposed (and you look so) I beg you will withdraw. I can have no pleasure in your company if you are to suffer by it."

Tears started into Isabella's eyes; so earnest and so affectionate was the manner in which Mr. Willoughby spoke.

"I assure you," she said, "that I am quite well; and I can be nowhere so well pleased as where I am now;

but I understand there is some addition to our last night's party—whom am I to see?"

"Oh here comes Burghley!" said Mr. Willoughby, "and you are always glad to see him."

"And I, always delighted to see my dear Mrs. Willoughby," said the handsome, gay, and good-humoured Burghley. "How do you do, my dear creature?" said he, shaking Isabella by the hand, "and how have you been these million years? and how is the baby? bless me! we have not met since those delightful evenings that we used to have in Grosvenor-square, which Lady Charlotte never could understand without my assistance; and how have you liked living amongst rocks and rustics? and how do you think I have been able to live without you?"

"Isabella must have Garaganta's mouth before she can answer all your

questions, in one word Burghley," said Mr. Willoughby.

"In one word!" returned Mr. Burghley, "no indeed! I mean that she should bestow upon me ten times as many."

"And the first shall be an inquiry after Lord Burghley," said Isabella; 'is he well? and where is he?'

"So you fob off the interest that I have in you, with referring me to that which you take in my uncle; but I love to obey better than to dispute with you. I thank God he is well, and as happy and benevolent as usual."

"And what young heir but yourself," said an indolent, foppish-looking man, with a voice of sovereign contempt, "would thank God for the health of an old uncle that keeps him out of an estate of ten thousand pounds a year?"

"I desire to know no one who

would *not*," said Mr. Burghley, darting a look of indignation at the speaker, "if the possessor were such another person as Lord Burghley.

Isabella had instantly recognized by the voice the brother of Lady Charlotte, and the very brother to whose gambling propensities she knew that she had alluded in speaking of a similar failing in Mr. Willoughby. Such a proof of the utter falsehood of what she had asserted as to the purpose for which she had endeavoured to assemble around Mr. Willoughby good and safe society, made her blush at once with indignation and shame; and the coldness with which she received Mr. Stanton marked what was passing in her mind so visibly to Lady Charlotte, that she cried out, "Pray, George, who directed your steps to Eagle's Crag? Did I not absolutely forbid you to come here?"

“But luckily, my fair sister, you are not lord of the ascendant; and Willoughby’s yea was more potent to bring me here, than your nay to keep me away.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, George,” said Lady Charlotte. “If I am not lord of the ascendant, I hope Mrs. Willoughby is lady; and I trust she will drive you away from her castle in less than twenty-four hours. Are you not ashamed to be neglecting everything in the world that you ought to do?”

“At present,” said Isabella, who was not deceived by this little artificial wrangle; “I believe we have all of us but one duty to perform; and I have only to hope that Westmorland fare may make it a pleasant one. Mr. Willoughby, pray take Lady Charlotte to the dining-room.”

“And shall not I take you?” said Mr. Burghley to Isabella.

“That honour is mine,” said Sir Charles, interposing.

“Then faith, Seymour,” said Mr. Burghley, “we must be the two Kings of Brentford; for I will not relinquish this fair arm.”

“Nor I this soft hand,” said Sir Charles.

And thus, conducted by her two beaux, Isabella was led in a sort of triumph to the top of the table; while Lady Charlotte felt the inferiority of having, as it were, been consigned to the master of the house, as in the course of common civility, and without any attempt from any other to invade his privilege.

In addition to the persons named, there were three or four other gentlemen who made up the present dinner-party, and who were all known to Isabella, and whom she soon found to have been collected together from the

different houses where they, as well as Lady Charlotte, had been visiting during the last month. They had therefore all some topic in common; the same sporting anecdotes to refer to, the same witticisms to sport, the same jokes to repeat.

Mr. Burghley and Sir Charles Seymour had also had their share in these physical and intellectual amusements; but they both seemed alike to have forgotten them in conversing with Isabella upon a variety of subjects, that their mutual acquaintance, or their different or agreeing tastes, could give rise to; while Lady Charlotte seemed to reign the sovereign of the other end of the table.

Thus the company that surrounded it might have been considered as two distinct societies, had it not been for the connecting link of Mr. Willoughby's well-bred and well-tempered attention to all; and not

least to Isabella ; who, believing that she saw in his manners a desire that she should be more diffuse, extended notice and conversation to all, till the whole air of coteriesship was done away, and a social communication extended to all.

Lady Charlotte's brow clouded as she saw herself thus out-generated ; and Isabella's expanded, as she saw the pleased approbation which spoke in Mr. Willoughby's eye whenever it met hers.

Who would have believed, who had not have looked below the surface, that Isabella was unhappy, or had cause to be so ?

CHAP. XXXIII.

“ To wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters.”

SHAKSPEARE.

NOTHING could exceed the urbanity, the sweetness, and even affection, with which Mr. Willoughby treated Isabella, whether they were in company, or alone ; but he discovered no mark of any wish, or thought of opening his heart to her, either as to his past chagrins or future plans. All was superficial ; and if she hazarded any attempt

to penetrate the interior, she was answered by a caress, or a slight expression, which scarcely made a reply to her observation. In the impatient hope that it would not be long before they were left to themselves, when greater leisure would afford more frequent and better opportunities of pressing the subject which she resolved they should not again part without having fully discussed, she forbore to importune him at a time when he could so easily elude all her efforts to obtain his confidence. But the hopes of a better future in this respect could not abate her alarm of the impending evil which she saw in Mr. Willoughby's increased intercourse with George Stanton;—an intercourse which she could not doubt, from the contemptuous opinion which she knew that Mr. Willoughby entertained of the general character of the man,

could only be grounded in their mutual liking for high play. Yet it appeared to Isabella, that it was rather to escape from his own thoughts than from any pleasure which he took in the trial of skill, or of fortune, into which he was always so ready to enter when called upon by Mr. Stanton, that he either threw the dice, or studied the cards. She was the more persuaded of this from the general restlessness that seemed to be upon him, and the eagerness with which he accepted every offered civility from his neighbours.

Either by the means of Lady Charlotte, or by some effort of his own, all obstacles to visiting at Eagle's Crag seemed to be done away. No distance deterred, no scruples prevented, a very general resort to a spot so long deserted, but which now was supposed to offer so many means of gratification or

amusement. It was quite another matter than when it was supposed that Isabella had retired into the country upon a plan of the most rigid economy. Since it now appeared that nothing could be more false than such a supposition; the fires now blazed in every room, and the lights now streamed from every window of Eagle's Crag; and all seemed emulous who should testify the earliest attention to the master of the mansion, who, it was now said, was come to fix his residence amongst the friends and acquaintance of his earliest youth.

All were received with the most bland and good-humoured hospitality by Mr. Willoughby; who, in addition to whatever motives he might have thus to hide himself from himself in a crowd, found an actual gratification to his love of dissipation and his love of expense, under a form so congenial to

some of the best feelings of human nature, that he never suspected that he was as great an idler and as thoughtless a prodigal, while doing the honours of his paternal mansion, as he had ever been in loitering up and down Bond Street or St. James's.

To make Eagle's Crag once more the scene of festivity and happiness; to renew the ancient intimacies of his parents; to testify his respect to all whom they had loved; to spend his property amongst his tenants and dependants, what could be more amiable? more noble? more just? All that was wanting to make it all these, was that he should have had a right to the money which he expended, and that the time which he gave to others should have been the surplus of hours which had already discharged the duties that he owed to himself and to his God!

But the present current of Mr. Wil-

loughby's thoughts were unchecked by such reflections.

In the first fervor of joy for his escape from the danger that had beset him at Brighton, he had thought only of the legitimate and hallowed pleasures that he should experience in reuniting himself to his wife and child ; and no chagrin could be more sensible than that which he felt in being intercepted in his progress by the accidental falling in, as he thought it, with Lady Charlotte and her party. With a design of eluding, if possible, her declared intention of visiting Eagle's Crag, he had suffered himself to be dragged from place to place for a day or two, but by so doing had only strengthened the chains which he wished to break. It was with undissembled and genuine reluctance that he had been at last compelled to receive her visit ; and this not only from his desire

to be alone with Isabella, to, and with whom he had much to communicate and arrange; but from an apprehension that he should derive little honour from the condition of a place so long neglected by him, or the state of a household, which he concluded must be so little suited to the appearance which ought to belong to the large and magnificent, though, as he feared, dilapidated mansion of his ancestors.

An invisible hand, of which he knew nothing, had averted the first evil, and the good sense and good taste of Isabella had supplied all that was wanting to remedy the second. He had been struck with equal delight and admiration by the order and propriety with which he and his guests had been received; but, above all, he had been astonished and charmed by the reception given him by Isabella, and by the dignity and superiority which her cha-

racter appeared to have attained. He listened to Roberts, until he thought it little less than miraculous that the young creature from whom he had parted so few months ago, and whom he had been accustomed to regard more as a plaything than as a friend, could in so short a time, and without the sacrifice of an atom of the simplicity and unassumingness which so peculiarly marked all that she said and did, have been so equal to the difficulties of the novel situation in which she had found herself; that she could so justly combine economy with a due regard to appearances; that she could submit to solitude and deprivations with cheerfulness; and, above all, that she could tolerate the irritating and trying suspense in which he could not but be conscious that he had so long kept her, with an equanimity of temper which had given her a friend

in every one who had approached her, and had secured such a respect to her character as made her the astonishment of those who could best appreciate the whole merit of such self-command.

All this Roberts knew how to insinuate without sacrificing any respect due to his master ; and Mr. Willoughby was never weary of listening to eulogiums so closely identified with himself, that he could not but admit a hope that she might supply all that was wanting on his part, to restore him to those better thoughts and more virtuous feelings with which he had set out in life, and the loss of which he regretted at times even with agony.

But while Isabella was the goddess of his reason, Lady Charlotte was the idol of his passions ; and the more so, because she had not wholly yielded to the impulse of her *own*. Thus far she had persevered in the refined coquetry

of allowing him to see that he was beloved, and in withholding every positive proof of her love. Hence he persuaded himself that his passion for Lady Charlotte was nearly as much a tribute to her virtues as to her charms ; and hence was he so sensitively alive to any imputation that the malignity or morose suspicion of others might attach to her. A suspicion of this kind had occasioned his spleen against Mr. Parr ; and any detection of jealousy on the part of Isabella would have been ruinous to the incipient interest that she was so powerfully creating in his heart.

Yet poor Isabella, in escaping from this danger, incurred another. Mr. Willoughby did not sufficiently understand the elements of a truly virtuous love, to comprehend how it could exist under neglect, and, as he could not conceal from himself, at times,

under evident marks of preference to another, and yet preserve the unruffled surface that Isabella's invincible sweetness of temper, and gentle acquiescence in all his wishes, never failed to maintain. The consequence was, that while he gave her credit for all the higher qualities of the mind, he denied her that warm and distinctive feeling which it is so flattering to the vanity of man to excite, and which he could tell himself, as an apology for his own aberrations, was the greatest charm in woman. The concentrated affections of Isabella remained unknown ; while the light particles of Lady Charlotte's base passion flew off and sparkled, and misled the unhappy Willoughby. Hence it was that, however dissatisfied he had been when he found himself so suddenly turned adrift at Brighton ; and discomposed as he had been by the unforeseen meeting with Lady

Charlotte, and her obstinate determination to accompany him to Eagle's Crag, he soon found in the flattery of her acknowledged attachment to him, an excuse for all that had disappointed, and all that had disgusted him. In affecting to take him as a monitor in the regulation of her conduct towards her husband, she found the secret of resuming her full influence over his mind; and in assuming the right of schooling him upon what she called "his follies;" she became the dictator of all that he should or should not do; and the depository of all his embarrassments, and his plans for obviating them. Thus, while he allowed Lady Charlotte to usurp the confidence so justly due to Isabella, he satisfied himself for the injury he did her, by endeavouring to persuade himself that her interests were safe in the hands of Lady Charlotte, and that it was a

kindness to hide from her details which could only serve to make her unhappy.

At this period then Mr. Willoughby was tolerably well satisfied with himself. He was not doing anything that he called wrong, and full purposing to do everything that was right; exalting Lady Charlotte in his imagination alike for the favours she granted, and those which she withheld; and taking credit to himself for the homage that he rendered to the excellencies of Isabella, he banished from his mind all thoughts of the future, except such as referred to the excellent conduct which he was *then* to hold, and gave himself wholly to the display of that magnificent hospitality and festive profusion, which could only have been well placed in the days of unimpaired fortunes and an unrepenting conscience.

CHAP. XXXIV.

“ I delight in masks and revels, sometimes altogether.
Art good at these kickshaws, knight ? ”

SHAKESPEARE.

WHAT were now the workings of Isabella's mind ? — Was she to be carried away with the stream, or was she to attempt to oppose some boundaries to a tide which swelled to her destruction ? To whom could she look for counsel or assistance ? The only eye of the many which were upon her, which seemed to understand her situation, or to sympathize in her feelings,

was Sir Charles Seymour's. In spite of the grounded distrust that she entertained of his principles, and of his designs, she could not but acknowledge that nothing could have been more irreproachable, and even praiseworthy, than the whole tone of his manners and conversation since his arrival at Eagle's Crag. All frothy gallantry was banished from his tongue; his admiration was expressed more by the homage of respect than the tribute of adulation. No word, dropped as if without design, betrayed that he was awake either to the folly of Mr. Willoughby's extravagance, or to the still more reprehensible error of his too apparent attachment to Lady Charlotte.

Isabella was not called upon to reprove the censurer of her husband; or to blush at the exposure of his weakness; yet she saw the delicacy with which Sir Charles interposed to stem

the current of the one, and to veil the other from the eyes of common observers.

She saw with how much address he contrived to preserve for her the pre-eminence so justly her due ; and how skillfully he baffled the attempts of Lady Charlotte to be known as the lady of the revels, or felt as the origin of the pleasures of the society.

Under pretence of saving Isabella trouble, or relieving her from exertions, that she *would* suppose were disagreeable to her, she would say, —

“ My dear creature, I know you do so hate all these things ! Leave all to me, and sit down to the instrument ; the chosen few will be gathered around you. I will do all the drudgery. Set the old dowagers down to cards, and the misses to dancing reels, or make them play at questions and commands ; and I will talk to the squires of their

dogs and their horses. What, indeed, would I not do in furtherance of that, which you know of? and which succeeds admirably. Willoughby was never happier in his life: I verily believe in a little time it will be as difficult to tear him away from Eagle's Crag, as it once was to drag him there."

Isabella recalled to mind Mrs. Nesbitt's assurances of the evident success of *her* plan; and was as little exhilarated by the happiness which Lady Charlotte discovered in Mr. Willoughby, as she had been flattered or encouraged by Mrs. Nesbitt's congratulations on the progress that she had made in his admiration, by her love for dissipation, or by the display of her taste in the fashionable follies of the day.

Isabella was therefore by no means inclined to take Lady Charlotte's advice in consulting her own ease, rather

than to maintain by some sacrifice the place that was due to her in the present society. By her own diligence, and the well-timed intervention of Sir Charles, Lady Charlotte never succeeded in any of these attempts to render herself important or necessary.

Isabella was the most gracious and attentive of hostesses,—the respectful administratrix to the accommodation of the old, and the cheerful partaker in the pleasures of the young; while Sir Charles never failed to step forward whenever it appeared expedient to do so, and so to bring Isabella into action, that Lady Charlotte was thrown into the shade, and all the country visitors received the impression that they owed to Mrs. Willoughby all the charms of their visit at Eagle's Crag.

Isabella could not be insensible to the obligations which she owed to Sir

Charles, nor could she be ungrateful for them. Involuntarily their eyes communicated on every incident interesting to Isabella ; and without a word having been uttered on the subject, she was more persuaded than if he had told her so a thousand times, that Sir Charles saw all that was going on, that he pitied her, and that he was zealous to befriend her. Under this impression she often unconsciously acted by his suggestion, and she grew accustomed to watch his countenance for a confirmation or a disavowal of what was passing in her own mind.

Yet not for all this did Isabella feel any alarm, nor had she reason to do so. Nothing could be more perfect than the line which Sir Charles thus silently traced out for her to tread ; nothing more consonant to the pure dictates of her own heart, thus sanctioned, as she thought, by his better knowledge

of the world, and perhaps by his more intimate acquaintance with the circumstances in which she stood.

She took, therefore, the part which she believed that prudence assigned her; and covering an aching heart with a cheerful countenance, threw no impediment in the way of any pleasureable arrangement suggested by Mr. Willoughby; promising herself that the interest which her yielding at this time would establish, might be used at no very distant period to avert the evil that otherwise seemed to advance with hasty steps to destroy her.

But thus, while with fiend-like art Sir Charles plotted to make her very virtues lead her to vice, and while he believed that he was every day becoming more and more master of her fate, she had another more honest and more open-hearted friend, who often threw himself between her and mischief,

without claiming or thinking of any reward beyond the simple pleasure of being of use to her.

Mr. Burghley was always the first to break up the card-table, or to cause it to be neglected, by calling the attention of its votaries to fifty amusing follies and boyish tricks. Sometimes he would appear in masquerade ; or he would act a scene in some play ; or he would insist upon dancing ; and being always sure of having the young and the gay of his party, he was able to overbear any opposition that the wishes of those who had other things in view might have made to his plans.

Most particularly did he manage to keep Mr. Stanton from Mr. Willoughby, as he well knew, that as to him, he was the most dangerous member of the society ; he frequently did this by giving Mr. Willoughby a substitute for the frenzied delights of high play, by

inducing Isabella to sit down to her instrument, and to accompany her music by her voice. This was an attraction which could draw him at any time away from every other, except the conversation of Lady Charlotte, who appeared every passing day, to add a link to the chains which she was throwing around him.

Mr. Burghley it is true found the gratification of more than one inclination, in practising this diversion in favour of Isabella. His boyish dislike to Lady Charlotte was increased tenfold by all that was now passing before his eyes ; and it was delicious to him to mortify Lady Charlotte, and to serve Isabella at the same time ; and when to this was added the defeat of what he could not but consider as the nefarious designs of Mr. Stanton upon the purse of Mr. Willoughby, his happiness was complete.

When the sounds of Isabella's harp, or the strains of her voice, caused Mr. Willoughby to play the wrong card, or suspended the impassioned attention with which he was listening to Lady Charlotte, Mr. Burghley's eye sparkled with pleasure; and when Mr. Willoughby said, "No more now, Stanton; I can play no more now"—or when he broke in upon Lady Charlotte's eloquence with, "Come, let us listen to Isabella; I really had no conception of the powers of her voice or her knowledge of music," Mr. Burghley was ready to dance for joy.

Lady Charlotte was too acute not to see all this, and in consequence she hated Mr. Burghley with a most devout hatred.

Mr. Willoughby's taste for music was genuine and correct, and it had been cultivated from his youth; but though he knew that Isabella was con-

sidered as being peculiarly accomplished in this science, yet he had never hitherto had inclination nor leisure to attend to her. There were too many public sources of this kind of gratification in London, to leave any want of it at home; and Isabella, whose retiring nature made her averse from all public exhibition, was scarcely ever a performer elsewhere. In Mr. Willoughby's more peculiar society therefore Lady Charlotte bore away the palm in all such exhibitions; and Mr. Willoughby little suspected how much she could have been excelled by Isabella.

But the scene was now changed: Isabella, in her own house, and at the request of her friends, could have no motive or inclination to decline displaying her powers, both of voice and finger.

The various and excellent musical

instruments which were to be found in almost every room at Eagle's Crag, enabled her to gratify the divers tastes of her auditors, from the sublimity of the organ to the light gaiety of the country dance.

She was always ready to comply with the wishes of any one who found their gratification in musical sounds; and not the less so from the effect, that with equal pleasure and surprise, she perceived that her skill and excelling powers had upon Mr. Willoughby.

“My dear Isabella,” would he say, “you astonish me; I did not know that you could thus ‘take the prisoned soul and lap it in elysium.’ It must be this northern air that has had such an effect on your voice; or have you some ‘little seraph that sits up on high,’ and sends forth such sweet tones, while you only move your lips?”

Isabella blushed, as though Mr. Wil-

loughby had been making love to her ; and in truth it was much more like love making than she had ever before heard from his mouth.

“ Is not the change more in you than in me ? ” asked she, smiling.

“ I know not,” replied Mr. Willoughby ; “ I would it might be so ! you astonish me in a thousand ways. I believe I must make you my bailiff, my house steward, and my head musician ; and if what Roberts says, and what I see and hear, is no waking vision, but sober sound reality, I certainly could not do a wiser thing.”

“ Might not the title of friend,” said Isabella, “ express in one word the earnestness of the wish to serve and please you ? and perhaps in this case explain all the powers that I can boast, and which you so kindly magnify beyond their natural size ? ”

“ Would I were worthy of such a

friend," said Mr. Willoughby with a sigh.

Oh, would to God that you really prized the blessing! thought Isabella, and sighed too — the time *may* come! and with that thought she cleared her over-shadowed brow.

CHAP. XXXV.

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.”

SHAKSPEARE.

By such anticipations, by the support that she felt in Sir Charles's discreet sagacity, and the more open efforts of Mr. Burghley in her favour, Isabella found herself enabled to go through, day after day, the various mortifications and tormenting apprehensions to which she was perpetually exposed. She believed that it was almost impossible that the present order of things should continue. She thought that it

could not be that Lady Charlotte, under any pretence whatever, could maintain her post much longer; and she entertained a daily expectation that the next morning would announce her intended departure.

This expectation, however, became fainter and fainter, when she saw that although the perpetual ill-humour of Mr. Dunstan shewed that he was as little satisfied with Lady Charlotte as Isabella herself could be! yet that, notwithstanding the never-ceasing war between him and Lady Charlotte on every other point, they appeared to agree in a mutual desire to remain where they were.

Mr. Dunstan amused himself with field sports all the morning; returned to indulge in the pleasures of the table; and filled up the evening between the whist-table and in saying ill-natured things to Lady Charlotte; or in talk-

ing of the great people who were in despair that they could not get him amongst them ; and in assuring Mr. Willoughby that he would not leave his society for that of the first duke in the kingdom.

Lady Charlotte also had a three-fold office ; the separate parts of which she filled with equal zeal and spirit. The mornings were dedicated to cajoleries with Isabella ; the dinner-hour to sarcasms on her husband ; and the evenings were given to the most undisguised coquetry with Mr. Willoughby ; and, because undisguised, could not be supposed otherwise than innocent. With Isabella she could even advance a claim of merit for such flirtations. It was wholly to amuse Mr. Willoughby—wholly for the purpose of keeping him satisfied with his continued absence from the dangerous habits of a London life.

“ I know, my dear,” she would say to Isabella, “ that *we* are living here just now at an enormous expense ; but what is it to what would be incurred in town ? And *there*, now the Hertfordshire house is sold, you must go immediately on leaving Westmorland. I tell Willoughby so every day. But I don’t tell him that I hope soon to wean him from the necessity of being always surrounded by such numbers of people, who consume his fat beeves and drink his wines at such an immoderate rate. But you will see, my dear, that this will soon be over. Our constant guests are thinning every day ; and what with your music, my dear, and my nonsense, I hope we shall be able to do garrison duty ourselves ; and then, I really cannot contemplate anything more agreeable or comfortable than our snug little party. I include Sir Charles Seymour, of

course; may be for weeks to come. And, my dear, we will live only upon Westmorland mutton and potatoës, with their ‘boiled up berries,’ and bid defiance to impertinents and *ennui*, even if we should be snowed up. But I entreat you get rid of that intolerable rattle Burghley first. He will never be content without some foolery is going on, nor without a regiment of fools like himself at his heels.”

When Lady Charlotte undertook to converse with Isabella, she was generally obliged to content herself with being chief speaker; to harangue, rather than to take part in a dialogue. Isabella usually heard her in silence, answered her with a civil monosyllable or two, and, as soon as possible, found herself some occupation that separated them.

But these monologues of Lady Charlotte were by no means useless to Isa-

bella. They often let in upon her a ray of light, which she would have wanted without them ; and nothing kept alive in her breast any degree of distrust of Sir Charles's integrity, but the toleration that Lady Charlotte extended to the constant protection that he gave to Isabella, even to Lady Charlotte's disadvantage. Mr. Burghley was the object of her avowed hostility for offences of the same nature ; and as Isabella knew that Lady Charlotte's penetration and pride would be to the full as much awake in the one case as in the other, so was she sure that Sir Charles would not have escaped her resentment if there had not been some sinister motive to bribe her to forbearance. The never failing to include Sir Charles as one of the family party, and the continually designating him as Isabella's friend, made her still more upon her guard against him.

An incident that occurred at this time awakened anew all the suspicion which she had ever entertained of the evil that might, under the fairest aspect, lurk at his heart.

Isabella had had occasion to remark that the name of Parr was not acceptable to Mr. Willoughby, and that he seemed still to entertain some suspicion of his sinister influence over her mind. She imputed this to his attributing Mr. Parr's refusal to visit at Eagle's Crag at this time to some injurious opinion adopted by him of Lady Charlotte's character. Nor was she mistaken in this supposition. Such was the impression that rested on the mind of Mr. Willoughby; and his knight-errantry called upon him to resent this, as he maintained it to be a most unjust, and narrow-minded imputation; and he had manifested his resentment not only in slighting

expressions of Mr. Parr, but in never having condescended to shew him the most trifling civility, making him the only exception to a most gracious and open-hearted recognition of every former friend and acquaintance who had ever been honoured by the regard of his parents.

“ He has refused to come near us ; I shall not presume to intrude upon his privacy,” would he say ; “ and I have reason to believe that our society is not suited to his taste.”

Lady Charlotte had evidently shewn that she partook of Mr. Willoughby's suspicions, and the indignation that they had excited ; and Isabella, feeling how grounded such reasons for Mr. Parr's absenting himself really were, could not but admit the probability ~~that~~ he was in fact actuated by them ; and in adopting this explanation of his conduct, she lost sight of the one that

her own penetration had at first suggested. Feeling, therefore, that she could not with truth, or with likelihood of success, attempt to subdue the prejudices of Mr. Willoughby, she had thought it best quietly to give way to them; and by never bringing Mr. Parr or his daughter under observation, to let all recollection of them, if possible, slip out of the minds both of Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby. In pursuance of this object she had carefully abstained from all personal intercourse with Fellbeck, and had restrained her notice of her friends there to a few friendly words addressed to Catherine, or some share of the dainties which now abounded at Eagle's Crag.

Thus it happened that the name of Parr had ceased to be mentioned; and not only might Isabella have had no such friends, but such people might never have existed.

All, however, that Isabella's discretion had suggested to keep them out of notice was rendered vain by the enthusiastic feelings and open temper of Mr. Burghley. His passion for the romantic scenes with which he was surrounded made him pass almost the whole of his mornings in scrambling over the rocks and torrents in the vicinity; and his first burst into conversation when he appeared at dinner, was generally a rapturous description of what he had been exploring during the preceding hours.

Hitherto his transports had been confined to the beauties of inanimate nature; but one memorable day he had no sooner taken his usual place on the left hand of Isabella, than, with an eye even more on fire than common, and a heightened colour, he cried out,

“ My dear Mrs. Willoughby, by

what other divinity are these solitudes of yours inhabited? I had thought you sole goddess here ; but I have to-day seen such a creature !

‘ Oh ! ne’er did Grecian chisel trace
So fair a form, so sweet a face.’

“ False quotation, Burghley ; and as false admiration, I suspect,” said Lady Charlotte, with a disdainful tone. “ An over-heated imagination, like an over-heated furnace, always mars what it touches.”

“ Oh ! I bow to the sublime rationality of Lady Charlotte Dunstan !” returned Mr. Burghley. “ But I would not advise you to put your foot into the circle of my goddess, for all that.”

“ What neat-herd’s daughter have you seen, Burghley,” said Mr. Willoughby, laughing, “ whose ruddy cheeks and black eyes your fancy has turned into charms of ethereal mould?”

“Oh! she is nothing earthly!” said Mr. Burghley.

A hair-brain'd sentimental trace
Was strongly marked in her face;
Her eye e'en turn'd on empty space
Beam'd keen with honour.
Down flow'd her robe, a tartan sheen —

“Mad! absolutely mad!” cried Sir Charles Seymour, interrupting him.

“I suspect not sir,” said a respectable looking old gentleman at the bottom of the table. “By the young gentleman's description I conceive he may have fallen in with Miss Parr; by her maternal descent she is of Scottish extraction, and therefore it is not unlikely but that she may affect the dress of her ancestors. I have heard that she does inherit her mother's beauty; God give her better fortunes! not to say better conduct.”

“Ha, ha,” said Lady Charlotte, these northern solitudes, I perceive,

are not more free from tales of scandal than the peopled haunts of busy men ; —pray, sir, tell me all about it ?” turning eagerly to the old gentleman, who was placed by her side.

“Your ladyship will excuse me,” returned he solemnly ; “charity covereth a multitude of sins ; and all is oblivion in the grave !”

“Now could I hug that delectable old Nestor,” said Mr. Burghley, in a low voice to Isabella ; but she heard him not. Her whole attention was engrossed by Sir Charles Seymour, whose trembling hand, and varying countenance, now pale, now glowing, spoke the emotion of his mind.

Entire conviction flashed on the mind of Isabella, that she was at that very moment sitting by the seducer of the unfortunate Morna, and the destroyer of the happiness of her highly valued friend Mr. Parr. She drew her

flowing garment closer around her, as if shrinking from the touch of something noxious; and shuddered with the remembrance how lately she had listened to such a man with complacency, and regarded him with confidence.

Mr. Burghley's quick sense saw in the twinkling of an eye that something was wrong; and filling a glass of wine, and bowing to the old gentleman, "'Then here's to the oblivion of all faults and follies," said he, "and mine amongst the rest."

Sir Charles pledged him, with an almost hysteric laugh, and the subject was dropped.

But the effect had sunk deep into the heart of Isabella. The more she reflected, the more she was convinced that she had not wronged Sir Charles by the suspicions to which she had given way: but was it equally cer-

tain that a lapse of years had made no change in his character or principles? Was it fair to condemn him now for an offence committed so long since, and which, for anything she knew, might have been repented in bitterness of spirit? But, without such a proof of his dereliction of integrity, had she not repeatedly had reason to be displeased with him on her own account? And could she trust even to the fairer appearances of later days, when there was too much cause to apprehend that such appearances were assumed to cover the basest purposes?

The result of these reflections was a resolution to be more than ever on her guard against Sir Charles, and to get rid of Lady Charlotte as soon it was possible.

CHAP. XXXVI.

“ All with me's meet, that I can fashion it ”

SHAKSPEARE.

ISABELLA had additional cause for being confirmed in both these purposes within the next eight and forty hours.

Wearied by the continual effort to which she was now called, let who would be her companion, she resolved to give herself a few hours' suspension from such a state of exertion, by one of those morning excursions with her boy, which had made the happiest

parts of her life previous to the arrival of Mr. Willoughby. She therefore ordered the nurse to be with the child at the garden entrance into the park, accompanied by the nursery girl and the pony ; for as she did not purpose to go to any great distance from home, she ventured to dispense with the attendance of the footman, who had now little leisure from the necessary duties of his office. Her wish was to avoid, if possible, meeting with any individual of the company that was at present assembled at Eagle's Crag ; and she therefore silently withdrew herself from the crowd, before the morning arrangements that generally took place immediately after breakfast had been made ; and joining the little party at the place appointed, struck directly out of the common paths and resorts of the park, into a wild and sequestered dell, where, by the height and

thickness of shelter from the northern blasts, and the exposure to a southern sun, she would be secure of a warm and a cheerful spot either for exercise or rest.

It was here that she had enjoyed two hours of the most perfect repose, and of the purest delight, in an abstraction from her usual state of contending feelings, and in witnessing the health, hilarity, and enjoyment of her boy. He was all life, laugh, and intelligence; and his animated actions, and his imperfect sounds, were to her the model of all grace, and the consummation of all human wit.

Seated on a dry bank, at the edge of the thickest part of the forest that overshadowed them, she was watching the child consume the last morsels of the meal which her foresight had provided for him, when a rustling amongst the trees behind her, occasioned her

to look up ; and she beheld a remarkably large and fierce-looking red stag, upon a high trot, in the immediate direction of the whole group.

“ Fly, fly ! ” cried she to the nurse : and at the same moment threw herself directly before the animal, and was the next laid low by his branching horns, and trodden under his feet. In this instant of imminent peril, the screams of the flying nurse and girl offered but faint hopes of assistance ; and had Isabella had time for thought, she must have given herself up for lost. But in fewer moments than the story takes in telling, the stag had been seen. Isabella had fallen under his attack, and she had found herself safe, and her enemy lying dead by her side !

“ Merciful Heaven ! ” said she, “ to whom do I owe such a deliverance ? ”

“ To one,” said a voice but too well known to her, “ who would have

thought his life a cheap purchase, had it preserved yours."

"Sir Charles Seymour;" said Isabella; "how came you here?"

"By a miracle, no doubt," replied Sir Charles. "But, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, do you rather question how I came, than rejoice that I am here?"

"But at such a moment!" said Isabella; "in a place so retired? when I thought myself so entirely alone! how came it, that I did not see you when I first saw the stag? and yet that you should be so near that you could shoot him through the head at so critical an instant?"

"Take my arm, I beg you will take my arm," said Sir Charles; "you tremble; you must be bruised; as we walk homewards I will tell you all. Come, let me assist to mount your nurse and your little boy; and they

may trot on before us, and send you Lady Charlotte's little carriage; for you ought not to have so long a walk after such a fright. I thank God that there seems to be neither dislocation nor sprain."

"I will not separate myself from my boy," said Isabella, fervently. "I will carry him myself on the pony, for the nurse trembles sadly; and if you will be so kind as to guard us home, I shall be much obliged to you."

"And yet," said Sir Charles, looking at her with a scrutinising eye, "you have not yet thanked me for saving your life."

Isabella cast down her eyes. "Can you doubt," said she, "whether I feel the obligation? add to it, I beseech you, by conducting us home in safety; never again will I seek the solitudes of the park; I see that they are beset by dangers."

“Dangers indeed!” replied Sir Charles. “If a melancholy mood had not sent me into these solitudes this morning, with my gun in my hand, I should by this time have been the most miserable of men!”

Isabella made no reply; fearing by farther exertion to increase the trembling and sickness of which she now became so sensible that she feared she should not be able to retain her seat on the pony, or to hold her child.

Sir Charles watched her looks with the most attentive solicitude; and, suddenly stopping the horse, which he was leading by the bridle, “You are ill,” said he; “you must alight; you must suffer the servants to go forward, and bring you a carriage.”

But the fear of being left alone with Sir Charles, overcame, with Isabella, every other fear; and calling all the powers of her mind to her aid, she

said, “ I am better ! — pray go on gently ; and in a few minutes I shall be well.”

At the same time she delivered the child to the nurse ; and rubbing her temples and the palms of her hands with lavender-water, she found herself relieved ; and presently after, perfectly re-assured as to her ability to proceed homewards without any farther assistance.

Both sides preserved an almost uninterrupted silence. The presence of the servants restrained Sir Charles in whatever he might have wished to say ; and Isabella was too much afraid of exhausting her spirits, and too much disturbed in mind, to be willing or able to say much : but, on her dismounting from her horse, she said, “ Mr. Willoughby shall thank you for my safety ; I feel that my thanks would

be very inadequate to the value of the obligation I owe you."

"And yet," returned Sir Charles, "cruel and ungrateful as you are! your thanks are the only reward that I either desire or expect."

"Allow me to quit you," said Isabella. "My limbs tremble; I must lie down." And, so saying, she took hold of the nursery girl's arm, and withdrew into the house.

The report of the danger that Isabella had incurred, soon spread through the whole household; and the anxiety of Mrs. Evans for the safety of her lady, brought her immediately to Isabella's apartment. The external injuries that had been received were small; a few scratches and slight bruises made the sum of them. To these, Mrs. Evans applied her surgical skill; but feeling more alarm from the agitated state in

which she saw **Isabella**, than from any of the contusions that she had received, she added to the gold-beaters skin and Hungary water, camphorated julep and lavender-drops, and recommended a recumbent posture, and perfect quiet for a few hours. To all this **Isabella** submitted; and the more willingly, as she learnt from Mrs. Evans, that neither Mr. Willoughby nor Lady Charlotte were within, they having driven out in Lady Charlotte's carriage about an hour before. **Isabella** therefore hoped that by the means of remaining quiet she should be quite recovered before their return, and able to treat the whole matter as an event that had left no consequences behind it. But before she retired to rest, she naturally went into the nursery to look once more on her boy, of whose escape she thought much more than of her own.

Nothing could be thought or talked

of but the adventure of the morning ; and the nurse and the girl were describing with gesticulation and eloquence the spot on which all had happened ; and detailing their own danger, and their own terrors, and their wonder that Isabella had not run away too, but had actually thrown herself quite under the foot of the mad creature. Isabella's appearance cut the narrators suddenly short in their story, and caused their auditors to break up the circle which they had formed around them : " Don't go," said Isabella, good-naturedly : " I shall not be here a moment ; and I am sure you must all long to know how your young master was saved so providentially."

" Why to be sure, ma'am," said the nurse ; " it was the good Providence that put it into my head to tell that good gentleman, as I stood waiting with the pony, and because he asked

me, that you were going to be all the morning in the park. But how he came to know just where, and just at that lucky moment, I don't know, for I did not tell him, because you know, ma'am, I could not ; not knowing myself."

Isabella scarcely wanted this confirmation of her suspicions, that Sir Charles's coming was not accidental ; that she had been watched by him, and that it must have been his purpose to have fastened himself on her as her companion in her walk home. What farther he could hope, she scarcely dared to conjecture ; but she could not resist the impression, that on his former forbearance and respect, he had grounded an opinion that he had made an interest in her heart, and had thrown her off her guard ; and that it would not be difficult to bring her to a more explicit avowal of her senti-

ments, and that this had been the time when he resolved to put the matter to an issue, and openly to plead for her favour.

“ This thought discomposed her more than all Mrs. Evans’s sedatives had contributed to the quieting of the nerves ; and after embracing her boy, and shedding over him some bitter tears, from thinking to what insults she was exposed by the neglect of her husband ; she withdrew to try what perfect stillness would do for her.

It had had the usual effect of composing her fluttered spirits, when the hasty steps of Mr. Willoughby along the gallery, caused her to arouse herself from her couch, and to advance to meet him. But all her agitation returned, when she beheld him trembling, pale, and speechless ! while he clasped her fervently to his heart, and, bursting into a passion of tears, she

heard him ejaculate blessings on Sir Charles Seymour, and thanks to the Giver of all good.

Astonished ; and transported with a sense of happiness which she had never known before, Isabella clung to Mr. Willoughby in all the confidence of acceptable love.

“ My dear, dear Willoughby ! ” cried she, “ be composed ! be happy ! such moments repay, a thousand fold, the alarm and danger that I have undergone. ”

“ Oh thou preserver of my boy ! ” said he ; “ how shall I thank you, or chide you enough for the hazard to which you exposed yourself to save him ! ”

“ Every mother would have done as much ; ” said Isabella. “ Every father could have done more. ”

“ Let us look upon our dear rescued jewel together, ” said Mr. Willoughby ;

“he must be early taught at how great a price his life might have been redeemed.”

Isabella hanging upon her husband's arm accompanied him to the nursery, and there passed a few of the most delicious moments of her life.

“Are you well enough to go down stairs?” said Mr. Willoughby; “you have other friends who long to congratulate you upon your escape. Lady Charlotte says that she shall not be able to believe that you are alive, till she sees you walk, and hears your voice.”

So, thought Isabella, fade all my joys! yet her answer was a ready acquiescence in his request; and they went together to the library.

Here Isabella had to undergo the painful effort of receiving with apparent thankfulness, congratulations which she knew were hollow; and of

listening to the studied details of Sir Charles, by which he explained very satisfactorily to all but Isabella, the “luckiest chance in the world,” that brought him to her rescue at so critical a moment. Mr. Willoughby seemed never to be able to satisfy himself with the expression of his gratitude. He varied it in an hundred different ways; and if he had had a kingdom to have divided, would have said with Herod, “ask what thou wilt, and it shall be given thee, to the half of my kingdom.” He gave orders immediately for a gala through the whole house, and seemed to consign himself wholly to the gaiety and happiness which so wonderful an escape from misery was so well fitted to inspire.

It seemed, however, as if Sir Charles was willing to intimate to Isabella that the most lively feelings, were not

always the deepest. He took the tone of sentiment; he remained tremulous and pensive, and let it be seen that he was so from the terror impressed upon his mind by the danger that had threatened Isabella. "Those may rejoice in mirth," said he, "that did not witness the horrible scene; but for me!" and on the slightest renewed allusion to the subject he would cry, "for God's sake don't name it!—it haunts me night and day!—the scene is constantly before my eyes—good God!—a moment later, and all would have been over."

Isabella could scarcely help reproaching herself for ingratitude in being unable to repay so much gallantry, and suffering by nothing more than a simple acknowledgment of obligation; but in spite of the plausibility by which he accounted for his sudden appearance, and the little

claim that he seemed to establish on her favour from the service he had rendered her, she could not but feel that there was affectation in the effect that he pretended the incident had had on his feelings; nor resist the conviction that there had been design in the whole transaction; and that not improbably he had been the cause of the very mischief which he so much gloried in having been the instrument to avert.

Under these thoughts she grew impatient in his society, and her wishes to see the departure both of him and Lady Charlotte took place of every other desire; but she soon found that there was less likelihood than ever of so happy a consummation.

CHAP. XXXVII.

“Can'st thou know peace? is conscience mute within?”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE intimacy between Lady Charlotte and Mr. Willoughby became every day more and more confirmed; more and more open. Long morning walks *tête-à-tête* were avowed; the evening conversations were more exclusive than ever, and Lady Charlotte's natural harshness of manner, seemed softened to something approaching to tenderness.

Mr. Willoughby had said to Isabella, "I think we cannot do better than to endeavour to prevail upon Dunstan and Lady Charlotte to take up their winter abode with us. We shall then be able to make head against the dreariness of its long evenings and snowy days; and it will be extremely convenient to me, not to go to town this year."

"*I* should not be afraid of encountering all the dreariness of Eagle's Crag with you alone for my companion," returned Isabella; "and would not the advantage of such a withdrawal from the expenses of London be much enhanced by the reduction of those that would be incurred by such an addition to our family as you propose?"

"Oh, all expenses would soon come to an end in that case," replied Mr. Willoughby; "for I should certainly

hang or drown myself in a fortnight. The alternative is society here, or ruin in London."

"Do not terrify me," said Isabella.

"Is there any thing terrific," said Mr. Willoughby, "in passing a few months here in good company; with good fires; good cheer; and your delicious music? this is what I offer you, and if you will accept it, all will be well; then time will bring every thing round. I have talked the matter over with Roberts; but to re-establish ourselves in town just now would undo all."

"I much doubt," replied Isabella, "that a few months of such seclusion as you propose will do any thing. You have imputed to me more than my due, in the attention that I have been drawn to give to circumstances which I could have been well content should never have come under my observa-

tion ; but from the knowledge that I have attained, I cannot believe that the evil is of so light a nature as to be cured by abstaining one single season from the expenses of a London residence."

" You do not know my resources," replied Mr. Willoughby ; " but we will talk of such things another time. I only mentioned the subject incidentally now, to know if you would object to domesticating the Dunstons with us for sometime to come. I dare say I could prevail with them to oblige us, if you make no objection."

" I never shall make an objection to what is agreeable to you," said Isabella ; " except I am compelled to the cruel option of chusing between your wishes and your welfare."

" Then the thing is decided," replied Mr. Willoughby ; " for in this

case they go together. The Dunstons shall stay with us."

"And Sir Charles Seymour?" said Isabella.

"Oh, that must be as he likes," said Mr. Willoughby. "I wish to God I knew how to show my gratitude for the inestimable blessing he has preserved to me; but his remaining here would only add to the obligation. Yet he would certainly be a very agreeable addition to our party, especially as Burghley leaves us to-morrow; but we can hardly expect that Sir Charles should make us such a sacrifice."

"I really do not see why we should desire it," replied Isabella; "and I shall be glad to find that he is not willing to offer it."

"And yet you do not seem much to delight in Dunstan," said Mr. Willoughby.

"I do not know who does," replied

Isabella. "I should have thought that you would have found him a very heavy weight in a *tête-à-tête*."

"I will take care that we are never reduced to that;" said Mr. Willoughby; "but do you make nothing of yourself, and Lady Charlotte?"

"You have given me little cause to depend upon my powers to preserve you from *ennui*," said Isabella, yielding to a sadness of feeling, which at that moment she was not able to resist.

Mr. Willoughby looked earnestly at her. "Those words are not in your usual spirit," said he.

"Then, if they displease you, be kind enough to forget them;" said Isabella.

"I think you could not mean to reproach me?" said Mr. Willoughby.

"Be assured that I did not," said Isabella. "If *there be* a fault it is

probably mine; and I am sure it was involuntary."

"But why so serious? why so sad, my love?" said he.

"Oh, Willoughby!" cried Isabella; "but forgive me: I would not offend you! I would not give you pain!"

"Forgive *you*!" said Mr. Willoughby; "alas, I fear that I have most cause to ask forgiveness! but in this embrace," cried he, clasping her to his heart, "be all misapprehension forgotten. I know your virtues; be candid to my faults, and I hope that we shall neither of us have any reason to complain."

Is it possible, thought Isabella, that he can at this moment be conscious that he injures me? Can he premeditatedly intend to injure me? I will not believe it. Yet to what a fiery trial does he expose us both!

Isabella, who was naturally tena-

cious of her sincerity, would have disdained to have sacrificed an atom of it to propitiate Lady Charlotte. She did not acknowledge the necessity of being civil at whatever cost of truth ; and she suffered the arrangement thus notified to her by Mr. Willoughby, as it had been made without her concurrence, to take place without any observation on her part. She thought that she read in Lady Charlotte's countenance when they met, an expectation that she would speak on the subject : she was but the more disinclined to do so ; and on her continued silence, she saw, not without some degree of triumph and pleasure, the expectation give place to disappointment and chagrin.

“ Have you seen Willoughby lately ? ” said Lady Charlotte.

“ Yes,” replied Isabella.

“ Then I suppose you know,—I conclude that he has told you, that

lie,—that we,—that you,—in short, my dear creature, I really have been obliged to comply with his so earnestly urged request, that we will remain here a little longer ; indeed I know it will be the best thing for you both : and I have always told you that you might command me for any period that you chose. But I did not think Dunstan would have been prevailed on. Poor creature ! he does so long to be amongst his Lords and his Dukes ! but I saw that if we had gone, Willoughby would have gone too ; and whether with or without you, my dear, I can assure you, appeared problematical ; but in either case the ruin would have been complete. You have not the art of controlling Willoughby's excursions ; the great matter is to keep him in the country till old habits are a little broken ; and you know you are not to mind us. We will have no more feast-

ings ; no second courses ; mutton and potatoes, as I told you before, and a little soup will do as well for four as two : so it will be all economy, and you and I must do the best we can to make the time pass easily, if not merrily."

" Mr. Willoughby," said Isabella, " has been so kind as to give me his reasons for what has been arranged ; and I have acquiesced in them. As to the economy of my family, I hope I shall be able to make it such as Mr. Willoughby will approve."

" Well, my dear, you are a good creature, that's the truth of it," returned Lady Charlotte, with a look of contempt ; " but I sometimes fancy I can see a little of the wolf under the sheep's clothing. I perceive you are resolved not to tell me you shall be glad of my company."

" As I cannot flatter myself that

my society has made any part of your motives for remaining at Eagle's Crag," returned Isabella, "you must pardon me, if I do not trouble you with any opinion as to the effect that yours will have upon me."

"Oh, I do assure you," cried Lady Charlotte, her eyes flashing fire, "that I am quite indifferent as to any of your opinions. I wrap myself up in my own integrity; and in the consciousness that under the sanction of your mother and mine, I am doing the best thing for Willoughby, and of course for you. But what do you intend to do with Sir Charles? after all your obligations to him, I hope you design to be a little more civil to him than you are to me?"

"Sir Charles will do what he best likes with himself," said Isabella; "and I cannot suppose that *his* friend-

ship for Mr. Willoughby will induce him to rusticate in Westmorland."

"Perhaps," said Lady Charlotte, with a sneer, "his friendship for *you* might exact such a sacrifice; to whom will he delegate the office of shooting red stags for you, when he is gone? and what will you do without such a valiant defender?"

"When that becomes the question," returned Isabella, wholly unmoved, "I shall know how to reply. As I do not wish *any body* to *sacrifice* themselves for Mr. Willoughby, so I will take care that no body *shall* sacrifice themselves for me."

Lady Charlotte felt awed by the dignity and spirit with which Isabella spoke:

"Come, come," said she, "don't let you and me quarrel. You know my hot way; but you know that it is

only a flash in the pan, and its all over."

"I quarrel with no body," said Isabella, regardless of Lady Charlotte's out-stretched hand; "and I give my friendship only to those I think worthy of it." And so saying she quietly withdrew.

"Oh, now I could destroy her!" said Lady Charlotte. And the words were not uttered when Sir Charles entered the room.

"Against whom are you meditating such vengeance?" said he.

"Against your idol!" returned Lady Charlotte. "That little detestable puritan, Isabella Willoughby; never, never will I forgive her for bearing that name!"

"I would I could assist you in making her lose it;" replied Sir Charles; "but the truth is, it is a little frost piece that there is no melt-

ing by kindness. I frightened myself half out of my wits, in hopes of frightening her out of the whole of hers ; that I might have the merit of rescuing her from a danger of my own creating. There is not one woman in ten who would not have thrown herself into my arms out of gratitude ; for when a man has saved a lady's life, there is nothing that she thinks she ought to refuse him. But she thought of nothing but throwing herself under the feet of the monster to save her boy ; and scarcely seemed to care that her life had not been the sacrifice. She neither fainted, nor lost her presence of mind ; but arose from the ground with all her senses about her, to question why and how I came there ; instead of clinging round me in fear, or in thankfulness for what I had made her undergo, or for what I had saved her from."

" Oh, you made a fine piece of work

there!" said Lady Charlotte; "exalted all her heroic qualities in the eyes of Willoughby; and even given her a hold upon his imagination, that were it not for my counter-working, might have been formidable."

"Well," returned Sir Charles, "if she is as cold as ice, she is also as fragile; and who knows but between us we may reduce her to nothing. I owe her a little ill-will; if she has no heart to win, she has one to break."

"Heart!" returned Lady Charlotte; "she has no heart! with her mincing duties! and regulated affections! who but she could bear to see Willoughby's passion for me with that unmoved countenance and unvarying demeanour? If I could but see her writhe upon the hook, I should be happy!"

"She may feel it as acutely, without making faces," replied Sir Charles; "but I suspect she does not think so

much of resenting the evil as of remedying it. She may think that the day may at last be her own."

"She dare not!" replied Lady Charlotte; "she cannot have the presumption to think so!"

"Yet there are symptoms," replied Sir Charles, "that Willoughby is opening his eyes, not only to her virtues, but her charms; you have yourself seen them."

"How dare you tell me so?" said Lady Charlotte. "Is it not enough that his foolish prudence robbed me of him as a husband? because, in sooth, I was not gentle, and meek, and mild enough; that is, not such a hypocrite, as the doll he chose; but do you so abet her pretensions, as to presume to insinuate that she will be able to deprive me of him as a lover?"

"I presume nothing," said Sir Charles; "but the game is up with us

both, if we do not carry our point by a *coup-de-main* ; if we do not look about us, with all our activity, the tortoise will win the race.”

“ What more can be done, that we have not done ? ” said Lady Charlotte. “ Have not I been attacking her with jealousy on one side, and you with adulation on the other, for this month past ? and what have we gained ? she neither hates me, nor loves you ; and I verily believe, if I were such a fool, I might run away with Willoughby, and she not care a pin about the matter.”

“ And I believe it would be the best step you could take to bring about both our ends,” said Sir Charles. “ It is possible that despair and revenge might yield me that, which I am farther off than ever from being likely to attain by gentler means.”

“ Why farther off than ever ? ” returned Lady Charlotte ; “ surely she is not so little of a woman, as not to have felt the perpetual immolation of my rights that you have been making on the altar of her vanity ever since we have been here. Let me tell you, Seymour, I have found it hard enough to bear, even while it seemed to forward my own views ; but if you have been such a bungler as to have done all this in vain, there is nothing on earth that I shall hate so much as you, except that insolent creature who will then triumph over us both.”

“ Isabella,” returned Sir Charles, “ has her own point, as well as you and I have ours. This point is to possess herself of the heart of her husband ; and to recall him, as she would phrase it, from the error of his ways. While any hope of attaining this point

remains, she will neither be turned out of the even path by jealousy, nor seduced from it by adulation; but despair and resentment may still be her ruin. The business be yours by some decisive step, to deprive her of all hope; and leave me to reap the advantage of her anger and desperation; and then we shall both have what we wish."

"And suppose you are so clumsy as not to know how to do so? what will be my situation? I tell you, Seymour, as I have told you an hundred times, I will not play the fool for any man that cannot marry me."

"But you would jingle your bells for one that could? would you not?" said Sir Charles.

"I do not know what I might not be tempted to do, that would rid me of my present plague. You must confess he

grows quite intolerable ; and is become so snappish and authoritative, that if I did not suspend the rod of his papa, the earl, over his head, there would be no living with him."

" Why yes, I do believe you would find Willoughby the gentler ruler of the two," said Sir Charles.

" No doubt !" said Lady Charlotte ; " besides, he is not an idiot like Dunstan. I can speak and be understood. Oh, the misery of being ' over-mastered by a piece of valiant dust ! ' ' to make an account of one's life to a piece of wayward marle ! ' and, Oh the folly of our laws that binds me for ever to such servitude, or presents an alternative that no woman of common sense would pass *par là* to her wishes."

" It is no part of common sense," said Sir Charles, " to remain always hesitating ; either forego the chase, or

seize the prey : why endure the misery you talk of any longer ? the remedy is in your own hands ; but you must make the first step : I will ensure you the second, and the third crowns your wishes.”

“ The first step ought to be yours,” replied Lady Charlotte ; “ and I despise you for not having got more secure footing already ; and what can you mean by being farther off than ever ? I don’t understand you.”

“ It is not necessary that you should,” replied Sir Charles ; “ but I tell you again, that the game is up, except you make some decisive step.”

“ Well, something must be done,” said Lady Charlotte ; “ there is no going on to be disdained, and triumphed over by a creature that I could crush to atoms any moment that I please. *If* she has a heart to break,

I will break it, or compel her to yield the prize for which we have so long contended."

"Bravely resolved!" said Sir Charles; "about it then! and victory attend you!"

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS AND SON, PARLIAMENT-STREET.



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